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NICK CARTER

NEW
WEEKLY

THE DICTATORS TREASURE



NICK MADE OUT THE STEAMER TO BE
THE VESSEL FOR WHOSE COMING HE HAD
ARRANGED

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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE DICTATOR'S TREASURE

OR,

Nick Carter Nips the Hondurian Plotters.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

Nicholas Carter was coming through East Fourteenth Street. It was a quiet evening in midwinter, though an unusually mild season had set in. The time was somewhere about eleven o'clock, and rather cold enough to tempt the dwellers in flats to seek their beds; so the broad street seemed, on the block between Avenue A and First Avenue, almost as deserted as a village street.

The detective's companion was the youngest assistant on his staff, and a protégé he had picked up shortly before while at work on a case down in the old Seventh Ward. This was the ex-street waif, "Pop-eye"—still a child in years, but as sharp and observant a lad as Nick Carter had ever come across.

Nick had dropped into the night school on Avenue A, near Tomkins Square, which Pop-eye attended, to see how the lad was getting along with his books, and the youngster had begged to walk home with him. Pop-eye never felt that he could take a really long breath unless he were on the street. Houses stifled him, as though he were a gypsy.

Suddenly the boy grabbed Nick by the sleeve and pointed up at the opposite house—a tall apartment building on the north side of the street.

"Pipe his nibs out there on the fire escape," chuckled Pop-eye. "Chee! is dat de Apache dance he's doin' all by his lonesome?"

The detective glanced up to see what was amusing his young friend. There was a dancing white figure on the platform of the upper fire escape—evidently a man with a flapping white garment about him, looking pretty cold for a winter's night.

"He looks as though he had just stepped out of his warm bed," observed Nick, as the man disappeared with abruptness, having fallen, or been drawn, backward through the window.

On the tail of Nick's speech a shrill cry sounded. The rumble of elevated trains, clanging of electric car gongs at the crossings, and murmur of voices in the distance—all these undeterminate sounds were suddenly dwarfed and made insignificant by that single, appalling shriek.

"That was a woman!" exclaimed Nick Carter aloud, still staring up at the high fire escape.

"'Twas a man on the balcony, boss. I seen his whiskers," declared Pop-eye, his protuberant orbs glowing in his excitement.

There was no repetition of the cry. Nobody appeared on the balcony. The whole house seemed asleep.

But to Nick Carter's keen ear there had been a note of absolute terror in that single scream. The woman's voice might have been choked off by some assault. The man who had appeared for a moment on the balcony seemed to have been in his night clothes; and he certainly had disappeared from the balcony very suddenly and very strangely.

"Let's look into this a bit," muttered the detective,

who did not believe in letting any unexplained occurrence pass him by without investigation.

That was one of the differences between Nick Carter and an ordinary citizen. The ordinary man, going home at this hour of the night, and seeing and hearing what Nick had, would have wondered, too; but after a moment he would have gone on about his business. A hundred to one he would not even have mentioned the occurrence to the policeman on the corner.

That is because most of us are cursed by a certain sort of selfishness. We do not want to "get into trouble." In this case, that phrase means that we do not wish to be mixed up as a witness in any business that can come into court, or may be investigated by the police.

Nick's whole life was spent in entanglements with the courts and the police. Neither phased him in the least. You or I would have hurried away from the spot, and probably lain awake half the night wondering about it, and have scrutinized eagerly the morning's paper to discover if a murder had been committed in that neighborhood.

"Come on, Pop-eye," said the detective, starting across the street; and his young protégé, nothing loath, followed hard on his heels.

An ordinary family fracas does not usually begin and end with a single scream. There had been no sound from the flat up there before the woman uttered her cry of terror; there had been no sound since. This fact was ominous.

As the detective approached the entrance to the building, he glanced down into the areaway to see if there was a light in the basement windows. The janitor probably lived there, and he expected to be obliged to rouse that person to get into the house, for it was not a tenement of which the front door would be on the latch all night.

But Pop-eye tugged at his sleeve again and pointed at the main door. That boy's ears were as sharp as his eyes!

He had heard the latch click. Somebody was fumbling at the knob on the inside.

Instantly Nick Carter darted into the vestibule, and when the door was drawn inward a crack, he thrust forward with his shoulder, and inserted the toe of his boot between the edge of the door and the lintel.

"Oh!"

It was a startled intake of breath rather than a cry. The woman fell back a step, and he was able to open the door wider and see her in the dim-lit hall.

"I beg your pardon," said the detective suavely. "I was just coming in. You saved me the trouble of using my key."

He already had a bunch of private keys in his hand, and he lifted his hat and smiled ingratiatingly.

She was still speechless, shrinking away from him, and evidently hardly able to recover from her fright.

"I am sorry if I startled you, madam," Nick added.

He saw in her face much that was attractive, despite the terror displayed there. She was dark, with a skin like satin; great black, long-lashed eyes, and clearly defined eyebrows that almost met over her finely chiseled nose. A lock of silky, ebony hair, that waved over her brow, had escaped from the lace scarf she wore about her head. Her lips were red, in spite of the fear that had set her heart to beating so heavily that Nick could see the lace upon her bosom rise and fall.

She might have posed as a figure of "Night." In another mood her appearance would have been brilliant; but she was really pitiful now, as she clung to the doorknob for support and swung unsteadily upon her feet.

The detective showed more impetuosity than was usually his wont. He stepped closer to her, and said:

"You're in some difficulty; can I be of aid to you?"

"Oh!" she breathed again.

"I am Nicholas Carter. This is my card," he said, quickly presenting the pasteboard and drawing her into the light of the single gas jet. "I chanced to be passing, and I heard your cry——"

"I did cry out," she murmured confusedly.

She read the card Nick had given her, however, and she began to gain some control of herself, too.

"Nicholas Carter—Mr. Carter," she murmured. Then she looked up at the detective suddenly and searched his face with her glittering eyes.

"I believe you are a detective. Haven't I been told about you? Can you help me?"

She did not seem to expect a verbal answer from him, but scrutinized him sharply while she spoke. Nick had risked revealing his own identity because he had made up his mind that, no matter what the trouble might be with her, she was no criminal. There was a mystery about her, too, that he wished to fathom; for, although he was sure he had never seen her before, and that her features were certainly not pictured in the collection at 300 Mulberry Street, Nick found that some chord of memory responded to the first glimpse he had had of her beautiful, dark face.

"If you need the sort of help a man of my position can render, I shall be glad to assist you," Carter said, with a measure of warmth. "Or, what any man can do to aid a woman in distress, I will try to accomplish."

"There is something that tells me you are to be trusted," she said simply. "Will you aid me without question—at present?"

"The explanation coming later? Certainly."

"Very well. First, you can go for Doctor Monteith, who lives around on Fifteenth Street—almost directly behind this house."

"Better than that," said Nick quickly. "I will send the boy here," and he turned to Pop-eye.

"Who'll I say wants the sawbones?" chirped Pop-eye eagerly.

"Tell—tell him Miss Dubois," said the girl faintly. "And that it is a very urgent case," she added.

When the street boy was off at a canter, Nick said:

"What can I do, Miss Dubois?"

"You cannot help him—nothing can help him, I fear," she cried, wringing her hands.

"Ah! you do not wish the physician for yourself?" asked Nick.

"No, no! I am not ill."

"But who—?"

"Señor Alvarez. Will you come upstairs with me? I should not be so long from him as I have already been."

"I follow you, madam," said the detective promptly.

CHAPTER II.

THE ASP.

The mystery was deepening in Nick Carter's mind. Not only was the girl's face familiar to him, but the name "Alvarez" struck a note in his memory that the detective knew must be of recent origin.

Señor Alvarez.

It had not become familiar to Nick because of the connection of the name with any recent case of his; nor was it the name of one of Adelina's friends. Had he seen it in some newspaper paragraph? This puzzling question occupied his mind as he climbed the almost interminable stairs to the upper floor of the apartment house.

The girl went on lightly, swiftly. Nick had all he could do without running to keep a pace behind her. He could hear her sobbing and panting, but she did not stop once in her swift flight until she reached the upper floor.

Then it was to open a little bag she carried and extract a latchkey. She was fitting this key into the lock of the flat door—the apartment on the east and, of course, at the front of the house—when Nick reached her side.

"Oh!" she breathed again, and there was a world of apprehension expressed in the single word.

The door swung open, and she quickly crossed the threshold. Nick merely stayed his own stride to close the door softly. The girl who called herself "Miss Dubois" had run through the long hall toward the front room of the flat.

Nick was only a few feet behind her, and he had already quickened his pace instinctively when she reached the door of the parlor. Instantly her voice rang out again in another shrill, eerie cry!

Nick sprang ahead, actually pushing her to one side, and was in the room, where a dim light burned, almost before the scream had escaped her lips.

There was a couch directly across from the doorway, and there were rumpled bedclothes upon it, and half dragged upon the floor. At the end of the room farthest from the windows, which opened upon the narrow balcony of the fire escape, was a desk table.

The man Nick and Pop-eye had seen for a moment on the balcony was kneeling before this table, clinging weakly to it, and had evidently opened a drawer at the moment the girl looked into the room.

He had turned his head and looked over his shoulder at her, and at the detective, startled by her scream. But Nick saw what he was about, and in a single stride he was beside Señor Alvarez.

The man was old, and gray, and wrinkled. His dark complexion and innumerable lines on cheeks and temple made his skin look like parchment. His thin, gray mustache and goatee gave him an austere expression; his eyes glared wildly.

And out of the drawer he had feebly dragged open he was lifting a revolver, with a mother-of-pearl handle and silver-mounted barrel!

Even while he had stared at the girl and at Nick, in this startled way, the hand moved on, and the muzzle of the revolver approached his own temple. Nick clutched the lean wrist of the attempted suicide, and with his other hand removed the weapon from the talon-like fingers.

"None of that, Señor Alvarez," he said sternly.

The man looked up at him, a strange smile crossed his face—convulsed it, rather—and he muttered:

"Why wait? Why wait? Death is sure—is sure."

Then suddenly he collapsed on the rug, and lay inertly with his eyes closed, but breathing spasmodically.

"Oh, he is dead!" cried the girl.

"No. It is a collapse. What is the matter with him?" asked Nick quickly.

As he spoke, he gathered the frail form of Señor Alvarez in his arms and carried it to the couch. As he laid the man down, the wristband of his pajamas was thrust back, and on the sallow wrist Nick beheld a little red swelling, with two tiny black dots in the centre.

The girl had hurried to the couch, too. Now she placed a finger upon this mark on the man's wrist, and looked significantly at Nick.

"That is the matter, Mr. Carter," she whispered, and shuddered as she spoke.

Nick looked closely at the lump on the wrist of the unconscious Alvarez, bending forward to do so until his eyes were close to the place. When he stood up again and let the man's hand drop, he looked his surprise at Miss Dubois.

"He has been bitten!" the detective exclaimed.

The girl nodded, still panting.

"By some deadly serpent—a cobra?"

"No. An asp," gasped the girl. Then she pointed to the floor, near one of the windows. "See!"

Nick crossed the room swiftly, and, on the way, reached up and turned the single burning gas jet on full. The room was instantly well illuminated.

Under the window, on the bare floor, he saw, first of all, a shattered milk bottle, and its contents spilled

upon the boards and soaking into the edge of the heavy rug that covered the middle of the floor.

But beside the broken milk bottle was another object—and yet another! The first a sharp, two-edged dagger, that may have been lying on the desk as a paper cutter, but was no mean weapon of offense, or defense, in a practiced hand.

The knife lay between the two severed parts of the final object, and the thing that caused Nick Carter the greatest surprise. This was the two halves of a small serpent, or asp—all together, in life, the creature had not been a foot in length!

It had been recently killed! The two halves of the body were still moving—the muscles stretching and contracting, in that way that has given rise to the old fallacy that a snake never dies till the sun goes down!

Nick stooped to view the dead asp nearer, but Miss Dubois clutched at his shoulder.

"Don't!" she whispered. "It is deadly. A scratch from its tongue is sufficient. I know, for my own mother was killed by such a creature!"

"And how came it here?" demanded Nick.

She shook her head and looked at the detective dumbly, the big tears forming in her eyes and running over her dark cheeks.

"You—or this man—did not keep the creature as a pet?"

She shuddered and shook her head.

"But you know all about this snake?"

"Yes," and she nodded.

"You knew just how deadly it was?"

"Yes."

"Did he know?" demanded Nick, turning suddenly and pointing to the man on the couch.

"Oh! better than I," cried the girl.

"Eh? How's that?"

"He had better reason to know all about the horrible little beast," she declared.

"Why?"

"It comes from his own country."

"Ah! And where is that country, Miss Dubois?"

"In South America."

"There is such an asp as this native to the upper reaches of the Orinoco, I understand," said Nick reflectively.

"It is like this asp, but not so deadly," declared the girl quickly.

"Then Señor Alvarez comes from——?"

"Honduria." She completed the sentence for him.

Nick started. He allowed his gaze to wander from the girl again, and linger upon the man on the couch.

"By Jove!" he muttered at last. "It must be! This is Manuel Alvarez, the deposed dictator of Honduria, who was exiled from his country in nineteen hundred and two. Am I right, Miss Dubois?"

"You are right, Mr. Carter," she said, bowing. "It is the much injured, much maligned, Señor Alvarez—a patriot, if a dictator; and his enemies, Mr. Carter, have reached him at last!"

CHAPTER III.

DOCTOR MONTEITH.

At least one-half of the mystery about these people was now dissolved in Nick Carter's mind. Manuel Alvarez was a name with which the newspapers of both hemispheres rang for a time, some seven years before.

Honduria was a state on the northeastern coast of the southern half of our continent. Alvarez had been the moving spirit in its politics and enterprises until his fall in the rebellion of 1902. The presidents of many of these Spanish-American republics are elected—or elect themselves—for life. The only way the people have of getting rid of one is to rise against his dictatorship, and either drive him into exile or shoot him!

This Alvarez hadn't been so bad as many of those two-by-two generalissimos who have troubled the face of nature near the equator and made human life cheap. He had done a lot for Honduria while he had his fling. Naturally, he did some things for himself.

The thing that made him the most enemies was the fact that he grew rich—just rotten rich!

He didn't graft more than the law allows, and he didn't sell concessions belonging to the State and keep more than half of the proceeds; but in some way, it was reported—and Nick Carter remembered it now—he was supposed to have acquired treasure that would have made some of the old Spanish conquistadors turn green with envy.

And when he had to get out of Honduria, escaping by night from his palace, and, on board a sailing vessel, it was reported that most of that vast treasure of his went with him.

This fact made Nick Carter glance about this decently furnished flat parlor with some puzzlement now. A man worth millions to be living in a Fourteenth Street flat, in Manhattan? It seemed preposterous.

The man on the couch still breathed deeply, stertorously. The girl had crept to his side, and, sitting on a low hassock, held the hand, just above which the deadly asp had struck in its fangs.

"Sit down, Mr. Carter," she whispered. "I started for the doctor; but it is true what the señor said. Death is sure."

"There is scarcely any poison for which there is not an antidote," said Nick weakly.

"There is none for the sting of this asp. Oh! and the devilish ingenuity of the villains that have brought about his pitiful end. They must have watched us for days! They learned his habits. And so, to-night, when he went for his accustomed glass of milk before retiring——"

"The serpent was not in your possession, then, before the—the accident?" asked Nick.

"No, indeed!" she cried, shuddering again. "It is dead by my hand, sir! I killed it—I do not know how I had the courage to do so, for I knew instantly what it was. Years ago—well, that is not to the point now,

Mr. Carter," she said wearily. "Let me tell you how this occurred:

"Señor Alvarez sleeps yonder in that first room. I have my own room at the rear of the flat, and was sitting there reading. I did not know that he was already retiring, and I came into the parlor here to speak to him.

"I saw him just stepping out of the window. After sunset to-night I put his bottle of milk out there, as usual, when the cold is not too severe. Sometimes he wakes in the night and is faint; he will often drink a whole quart before morning.

"I was about to turn back to my own room when I saw him leap in the air, springing backward to the open window. He did not cry out, but I knew that something was the matter, and—and I have always been fearful of some attack."

"Why?" interjected Nick.

"That—that I will tell you later," she replied, seemingly confused by the question. It was a minute before she could continue her story.

"I seized that knife you see on the floor yonder and ran across the room. Señor Alvarez fell into my arms, and, as he did so, the milk bottle dropped from his hand and was broken.

"And clinging to his wrist was that horrible, writhing creature, fastened to his flesh by its fangs! I struck at it once—I severed its body—it fell where you see it lie now. And—that's all!"

She scarcely breathed the last word, so overcome was she. Lying back against the couch, the hand of the poisoned man dropped from her grasp. He did not stir, but continued to breathe heavily.

Nick did not trouble her then. He heard steps in the hall, and he went swiftly to the door to admit the doctor and Pop-eye.

"Doctor Monteith," said the physician curtly, introducing himself and eying Nick with evident curiosity.

"I am a friend of Miss Dubois," said Nick simply. "It is Señor Alvarez who needs your attention, doctor."

The detective saw the professional man start and turn red. He seemed half tempted to turn his back on the patient and go away.

"I understood from the boy that Miss Dubois needed me," he said, in anger.

"She does."

"But this Alvarez——?"

"General Alvarez has had the misfortune to be bitten by a serpent that is believed to be deadly in its bite, doctor," said Nick, interesting the physician at once. "The serpent is dead. The man lies there," and he pointed to the couch on which the unconscious Alvarez was extended.

The statement and the presence of a patient to work over brought Doctor Monteith evidently to better mind. Whatever might be his objection to Alvarez—and that objection was obvious—he was a professional man first!

He hurried to the couch now, and put the sobbing girl aside as brusquely as though she were an entire stranger to him. Nick believed, from little things, however, that there was something between these two.

The physician looked at the wound on the Spaniard's wrist. Then he turned to Nick.

"Will you help me?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"This must be cauterized, and we will find some antidote for the poison. What kind of a snake, did you say?"

"I am free to confess, doctor," said Nick, as they lifted the man between them and carried him into the other room to lay him on his bed, "that I believe with Alvarez and Miss Dubois, that the bite of the asp is fatal. I know there is such a creature in the South American mountains."

"How did it get here?" demanded the doctor.

"That she has not told me."

"I do not admit that any active poison of this kind is fatal," grunted Doctor Monteith, who evidently belonged to the class of professional men who refuse to accept defeat. "He is drugged by the effect of the virus now; there will probably be an active stage later. I will see what can be done."

Nick went back to the front room and found the girl sitting just as they had left her. She seemed now to be stupefied by the catastrophe. Pop-eye had found the severed serpent under the window, and was poking it about with the point of the knife, to see the parts quiver and writhe.

"Is this a sure-enough snake, boss?" whispered the eager urchin. "And did it do the biz for the old geezer?"

"It is supposed to be a poisonous reptile," returned the detective. "And it bit Señor Alvarez."

"I hear tell dat snakes like milk," said the boy, who was an omnivorous reader of a certain class of literature. "Was he coiled around de milk bottle?"

Nick stepped back to Miss Dubois and laid a tentative hand upon her shoulder. When she looked up, staring at first wonderingly at him, he asked:

"What do you know about the nature of these asps, or adders, or whatever the serpent is?"

She shuddered. "Oh! I almost fear to talk about them. I have seen them—ah!"

"Are they common in Honduras?"

"No, no! They are hard to find. And nobody but a wicked person—a very wicked person—would save one alive."

"Have they a habit of drinking milk?" asked Nick curiously.

"That is just it—don't you see? Otherwise Señor Alvarez would not have been bitten. The beasts do not attack human beings unless they are disturbed. It was coiled around the milk bottle."

"Out on that balcony?"

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

Nick went thoughtfully to the window and stepped out upon the fire escape. There was a little box there

and in it was the round mark the bottle of milk had made. The moonlight showed him that much.

The detective, with his usual care, scrutinized his surroundings. The fire escape could be reached only from the two windows of this flat. There was a second balcony for the other side of the house, and the two were too far apart for a man to swing himself from one to the other without assistance.

Besides, as it was directly above the street, a man attempting the feat would be likely seen, whether the acrobatic trick were tried by day, or by night.

Nick made up his mind instantly that, if the deadly little serpent had been brought to the box where the milk bottle stood from without the flat, it did not come by the way of the neighboring apartment. That would have entailed too much risk.

He glanced up at the roof coping that was not more than six feet above his head. It would have been easy for any person to have dropped the serpent from the roof's edge into the box. And it must have been done, of course, not long before Alvarez came out for the milk bottle.

The way in which the deadly asp came to be in the box was pretty clear. Who had done the deed, and what the means used to reach the roof of the house, were matters for future investigation.

To Nick's mind the main question—the first question, indeed—was the reason for this atrocious murder. Miss Dubois held the key to that mystery. Therefore he stepped back into the parlor again.

Pop-eye was wandering about the room, his prominent eyes feasting on every scrap of furnishing. He came to Nick with something in his hand.

"Here's de cap off de milk bottle, chief," whispered the boy. "Somebody punctured it—see?"

The cap was of pasteboard, and bore the printed advertisement of the company furnishing the milk. A small hole had been drilled by some sharp instrument through this round cap.

The snake certainly could not have done this. But enough milk must have oozed out through the hole to attract the serpent. This thought gave rise to some doubt in Nick Carter's mind.

Had the person who compassed Alvarez's death—for the man could not be saved despite the confidence expressed by the doctor to the contrary—really dropped the asp from the roof's edge? How could a hole have been drilled in the milk-bottle cap from that height?

Here was a circumstance pointing to the connivance of somebody who had access to the flat. Who else but Alvarez and the girl occupied the rooms?

Nick wished to examine Miss Dubois, but he did not want a third party within earshot. The doctor, he saw, was watching by the bed of the man, waiting for him to come out of his lethargy so that he might apply active remedies which he believed would counteract the poison injected into Alvarez's blood.

Nick took Pop-eye to the door, gave him some instructions, and shut him out of the flat. Then he

went back to the girl and aroused her again with a touch.

"Miss Dubois," he asked, in a low voice, "are you able to answer a few questions that I wish to put to you?"

"About this terrible thing?" she returned nervously.

"Yes."

"It—it must be discussed, I know," she said, rather irrelevantly. "And I know you are the very person to discuss it with. But I am so overcome—"

"Time is everything in a case like this. You and I both know," added Nick meaningly, "that the asp was placed where Señor Alvarez would get it within a very short time."

"That is true. It must be so," admitted the girl.

Both she and the detective spoke all through their dialogue in an undertone so that the physician could not possibly hear from his present position.

"Have you had a caller here this evening?" asked Nick pointblank.

"I? I never have callers," declared the girl, in some surprise.

"You mean that nobody ever comes to the flat here to see either you or Señor Alvarez?"

"Scarcely anybody."

"You have no maid?"

"Yes. But she comes in the morning and goes home after dinner."

"What time did she go to-night?"

"At half-past seven, or about that hour. Oh, sir, I couldn't suspect her of having anything to do with this awful thing."

"Never mind that. What sort of a woman, or girl, is she?"

"She is a Swede, and we have had her a year. Anna is a good girl. And beside, Mr. Carter, she could never have placed that beast out there. I put the bottle of milk on the fire escape myself after she left the house!"

"Indeed! At what time?"

"I was bringing in the milk from the ice box when Anna left. As I tell you, I arranged Señor Alvarez's couch, and the reading lamp, and put out the milk for him, and then went back to my own room."

"At half-past seven?"

"About that."

"And nobody was in here after that time?"

"Oh! the doctor," whispered Miss Dubois. "But only for a moment."

"This doctor?"

"Yes, Doctor Monteith. I might say that he is the only person who has called here for months."

"Called to treat Señor Alvarez?"

"No-o," said the girl slowly.

"Yourself, then, of course?"

"I was feeling ill during the hotter part of the summer, and the señor called in Doctor Monteith against my wish. He prescribed for me. He came several times."

She seemed confused again, and spoke very slowly, choosing her words. But Nick appeared to pay no attention to her hesitating manner.

"And to-night?" queried the detective evenly.

"Er—to-night? He—he called on the señor."

"At what time?"

"Shortly after eight o'clock."

"After you placed the bottle of milk on the fire escape," said Nick, with intentional emphasis.

"Oh!" she whispered. "Don't say that, I beg of you!"

"Why not?" asked the detective coolly.

"Oh, sir, the suggestion is awful! I do not believe the doctor could do such a thing——"

"What thing?"

"You know well, Mr. Carter, what your suggestion implies," said the girl desperately, turning at last to look Nick full in the face.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOTIVE.

"Tell me, please," said Nick, "just how much you know of this Doctor Monteith?"

Miss Dubois, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, bending forward to bring her lips near to the detective's ear, whispered nervously:

"I know very little of him. We never met until he came here to treat me, now two months ago. Señor Alvarez did not know him."

"How did he come to engage him as your physician, then?"

"The janitor recommended the doctor."

"Quite in an informal way?"

"One morning I had a fainting spell. I am not naturally a weak woman. Señor Alvarez had never seen me ill before. He became frightened."

"I understand."

"He ran out of the flat, and the janitor was sweeping the upper hall. He asked him about a physician."

"I see."

"The man said that Doctor Monteith bore an excellent reputation and had been a long while in the neighborhood."

"So he sent the janitor for him?"

"The señor sent the janitor's little girl. As I say, the doctor called several times—professionally."

"And then?"

Miss Dubois flushed and bit her lip. But Nick's steady gaze held her to the point.

"It seems as though I were accusing an innocent man!" she whispered desperately. "Doctor Monteith had nothing to do with this dreadful tragedy to-night."

"I do not know that he did," returned the detective calmly. "But to get at the truth one must often thrash out a deal of rubbish. Give me a reason for the doctor's calling here after your own illness was cured?"

The blood flowed into her dark cheeks again, and she looked at the detective with half-veiled eyes.

"I believe I am not self-deceived," she whispered, "but Doctor Monteith has shown some interest in me."

"That would not be surprising," said Nick, with a smile. "And your feeling toward him? It is a blunt question, but consider my position, Miss Dubois. I am a father confessor."

"I understand. Yes, I will be frank. I like him—as a friend."

"But you have never considered him as a lover?"

"I could not do so."

"Could not?"

"No. I have nothing to do with such sentiment," said the girl sadly. "I—I cannot easily explain, but I would allow myself to look on no man in that light."

"Did you discourage the doctor, then?"

"I tried to."

"Did he press you?"

"No—he refused to take my answer as final."

"And his visit this evening?"

"Was to urge Señor Alvarez to use his influence in aiding his suit," said the girl, hiding her face again. "He—he seemed to think that Señor Alvarez was partly responsible for my attitude. He declared that the señor had no right to allow me to live here as we do, shut off from the whole world. He—he—— Oh, Mr. Carter, he said much that you can imagine a foolish man might say——"

"A man who was in love, you mean?"

"Ye-es."

"Well. What else?"

"He went away angry with Señor Alvarez, because he would not encourage his suit, or try to influence me."

"He went away angry?"

"But he did not come here angry!" exclaimed the girl hastily.

"And you were in the room?"

"Not all of the time. But I went to the door with him. He—he was deeply moved, Mr. Carter; and he touched my heart, too—but not in that way," and she sighed.

"Tell me without hesitation, please, if in your opinion the doctor could have gone to the window while he was here, unnoticed by either the señor, or yourself?"

"Oh, Mr. Carter! I wish I had said nothing about it," cried she.

"In fact, you at first intended to ignore the fact that he was here at all?" proposed Nick shrewdly.

"It is true."

"And because you feared I might suspect him?"

"Yes. And I know he could not have brought about this awful thing."

"How do you know? Why are you so positive?"

"Call it my intuition. But it is more. The doctor truly loves me. Grant that a woman must know when she is really loved!"

"If I did I must ignore the records of divorce courts and breach-of-promise cases," returned Nick, smiling. "That is not a valid reason in this case, Miss Dubois. Indeed, as he wished to get you to leave Señor Alvarez, and the old gentleman was really in his way, a motive is at once suggested."

"No, sir! The señor was not an obstacle," cried the girl, still under her breath.

"Would the doctor admit that?" asked Nick pointedly.

She was silent. The detective nodded, having pinned her at that point, and then asked:

"Please tell me if the doctor could have got to the window without you, or the señor, noticing what he did there?"

She nodded and sighed.

"He could?"

"Yes. I left the room, unwilling to listen to him longer. Señor Alvarez followed me to ask me a question."

"Yes?"

"He asked me if—if I loved the doctor," explained the girl, blushing again.

"And the doctor was alone here?"

"Yes. For two or three minutes."

"Very well. Remember, I do not accuse him of complicity in this thing——"

"Oh, sir, it would be impossible," declared the girl again, and wringing her hands. "If you look for a motive for the señor's death, I can give you a better one."

"So I presume. You have your own suspicions undoubtedly?"

"I know," she said earnestly.

"You intimated as much before," said Nick, looking at her closely. "You said that his enemies had got him at last. But might not the doctor be an instrument in their hands, too?"

"No, no!" cried the girl, almost wildly.

"Do not excite yourself," warned Nick, as he heard the doctor moving in the other room. "But tell me, calmly if you can, what you believe the motive to have been, and the identity of the person, or persons, who seem to have accomplished a most atrocious crime here."

"It is nothing like this that you suggest, Mr. Carter," said the girl sternly.

"Well. You must not criticise my shallowness. Remember, that I know few of the circumstances—yet."

"But you speak as though you would know them all!"

"That is my hope," he replied modestly.

"Do you know anything of the history of this much injured and much maligned patriot of Honduras?" she demanded, with suddenness.

"I have never heard him called a patriot before the word passed your lips, Miss Dubois," said Nick dryly.

"Ah! so you believe the stories reported by his enemies?"

"I have no belief on either side. I know nothing about Señor Alvarez's character."

"I do," said the girl warmly.

"And you evidently think highly of him?"

"He has been a friend—a father—to me for more than ten years. He would have saved my mother from a great villain—could he have done so. This," and she pointed at the dead asp in the corner, shuddering again, "brings it all back to me."

"But, my story is not what you want. It is the story of General Alvarez—and not in his power, but the story of his exile."

"I am listening," said Nick thoughtfully.

"Of course, you know how his influence was undermined by General D'Conyer, and the army won over from him by specious promises? Treachery as black as ever was spawned in the depth of Hades brought about his overthrow!" said Miss Dubois, smiting her hands together with vigor. "And all for what? Because General D'Conyer and his friends wanted the president's private fortune."

"I remember something about that fortune," said Nick. "It was reported that there had come into Señor Alvarez's hands a treasure greater than the combined wealth of several European kingdoms. Was it so?"

"I do not know," said the girl frankly. "But this I do know: If he possessed so much money, Señor Alvarez came by it honestly!"

Nick had no comment to make. He waited for further explanation.

"It was knowledge noised about of this wealth, I admit, that undermined the love of the common people for the president. They are dogs at best—ignorant, untrustworthy dogs!"

"You do not respect your fellow countrymen," said Nick curiously.

"They are no countrymen of mine!" she cried. "I am not a Hondurian. My mother was a Louisiana Creole—and of an old and well-known family. But that is not to the point. This supposed vast wealth of Manuel Alvarez fanned the desires of those rebels. We had to flee the country. But they did not get the treasure!"

Nick looked around the little parlor again, wondering why a man with so much wealth should live so modestly.

"I do not know what the señor did with his wealth," declared the girl simply. "But I do know that it has made him the object of many attacks during the seven years that we have been here in America. Not actually bodily assaults before; but attempts have been made by unscrupulous Hondurians to get him into trouble with this government, and with the police, or to make him divulge the secret of the treasure."

"Now, desperate and weary of their efforts, they have wreaked their vengeance upon him. See! who else but a Hondurian would have imagined such a crime as this, sir? Who else could have known of

the deadly asp of the mountains? Who would have known that the terrible little beast was so fond of milk? And to have selected this warm spell so unusual to the season, for otherwise the serpent must have frozen.

"Why, in the highlands of Honduria, the women never milk their goats of a morning, until they have swept out the hut where the animal has spent the night, for fear one of these little serpents may be near. Ah, this was a Hondurian plot, Mr. Carter, and there is your motive."

At the moment there was some sound from the inner room. Nick Carter raised his eyes suddenly and confronted a mirror at the end of the room. It reflected the doorway of the bedroom, and for a fleeting instant he saw the face of the doctor peering around the lintel.

But the face disappeared, and then, from the bedside, the calm, even tones of the physician's voice sounded:

"Mr. Alvarez is becoming conscious. Will you help me?"

CHAPTER V.

THE TREASURE.

Nick Carter may or may not have suspected the doctor's connection in the crime which he knew to have been committed here; but he gave no sign as he hurried to do the other's bidding.

Alvarez was stirring on the bed. Under the gaslight the man's dark face seemed more hollow than before, his beard and mustache were disarranged, his thin gray hair was tousled above his wrinkled brow. Out of the drawn face, when his eyes opened, they burned like balls of liquid fire.

But he was perfectly conscious.

"Ah, doctor! They called you for nothing," he gasped.

"We will get you out of this all right, Mr. Alvarez," said the physician in his most unctuous professional tone.

Alvarez cackled a feeble laugh.

"You are a smart young man. You know your business," he whispered. "But you have never seen the poison of the asp work before, and you'll find no antidote for it in all your pharmacopoeia. Ah!"

"Take this," said the doctor brusquely, offering a glass with some preparation in it.

"Thank you," whispered the ex-President of Honduria, with the courtliness which was so natural to him.

"How do you feel?"

"Merely a numbness in the limbs now," said Alvarez calmly. "That always follows the comatose state. The gripings come—come later. Ah, sir!" and he looked at Nick Carter, "you should have allowed me to have used the phial. It would have saved me a dent of pain later."

"You talk foolishly, Mr. Alvarez!" cried the doctor impatiently. "We are not going to let you die."

The old man shook his head and looked up at the keen-faced young physician very sadly.

"I am sorry, doctor," he said, "that your reward is not waiting for you. Believe me, if I could say the word that would change Cecile's attitude, I would say it now, as I would have said it previously. I believe you might make her happy. You are a good fellow."

The doctor flushed painfully, and then paled. He glanced at Nick and opened his lips to speak, but was prevented by the murmuring voice of Alvarez, which continued:

"Nothing you can do will save me, doctor. Perhaps I have lived long enough, anyway. I was useless to my country, for my country would have none of me, at last. I do not blame them—poor fools!

"But some time the power of the villains now cursing Honduria with an imitation government," he added more vigorously, "will be broken. Some good man will arise, perhaps, who will have the welfare of the people and the land at heart. That man I wish I might help. And, had I been given time to perfect my plans, I would help him. Oh, for a little more time!" he cried, trying to rise up in the bed.

But the benumbing influence of the poison was like paralysis. He could scarcely lift his head from his pillow.

"Where is Cecile?" he murmured.

Nick, knowing him to refer to Miss Dubois, led her forward by the hand. The old man smiled upon her and whispered:

"My dear daughter! Had she been of my own blood she could have done no more for me. And all I have is hers. I have made my will. Joliffe & Moran have it. I hope they will care for her interests."

"They are perfectly trustworthy attorneys," said Nick Carter. "I know Mr. Moran well."

Alvarez fixed his eyes upon the detective's face, and his own countenance expressed some wonder.

"Do you mind telling me who this gentleman is?" he murmured, after a little. "I should know him, should I not? Yet I do not recall—"

"I am called Nick Carter," began the detective. "I chanced to be passing the house when the accident happened—"

"Carter! Nick Carter!" cried Alvarez emphatically. "The very man I wished to see! You were recommended to me by Mr. Moran himself."

Nick felt some measure of surprise, but he did not show it. He merely looked at the doomed man on the bed and waited for some explanation.

"You are the famous detective?" whispered Alvarez, after a moment's rest, for his powers were waning.

"I am a detective," admitted Nick.

"I have known—rather, I expected—that something would happen to me for a long time," said

Alvarez reflectively. "Death, indeed, has cast its shadow across my path ever since I escaped from my enemies in Honduria, and they found that my wealth was beyond their reach."

"It was rather fantastic to hear this man speak of his 'wealth' in a moderately well-furnished thirty-dollar a month flat!"

Nick, however, having digested the little that Miss Dubois had already told him, accepted this statement as fact, and said:

"Knowing you to be possessed of the secret of the hiding place of your hoard, señor, why have your enemies tried to kill you now?"

"They have killed me," said Alvarez bitterly. "Nothing this good fellow, the doctor, can do for me will stay the action of the poison. I know that——"

"Nonsense!" broke in Monteith. "Get that idea out of your mind, Señor Alvarez."

The old man smiled and wagged his head, as it lay on the pillow, from side to side.

"I am going. I have but a few moments more to speak consciously to you all. I am glad you two men are here now as witnesses to my statement. All I have—all I die possessed—is to be Cecile's. Don't forget that. The will covers everything."

"And perhaps the very fact that I made a will has brought about my death," whispered Alvarez. "I only did this recently. My enemies, after these years, finding I could not be scared, or cajoled, into giving up the secret of the treasure, hope now to work upon the mind of my heiress."

"With me dead, they expect that some move will be made by the executors to obtain the treasure which will be Cecile's—for a distinct purpose. Cecile knows what that purpose is, do you not, my dear?"

"Yes, yes!" murmured the girl, through her tears.

"My will arranges everything," murmured Alvarez, looking again at the interested detective. "But it ignores one important matter, Mr. Carter."

"The place of concealment of your treasure?" hazarded the detective.

"You have guessed it! I could not confide that to paper. I could not confide it to a soul. Even Cecile has no idea of the place the treasure is in or of the means necessary to be taken to obtain it."

"Not a soul knows but myself," gasped Alvarez, evidently speaking with much more difficulty. "No man helped me in hiding it. I spent every night for a week before my escape from the palace at Santa Luca in placing the treasure where it would be safe from prying eyes. And, Mr. Carter, whatever you may have heard about my private riches, I can assure you you have not heard the truth. I do not know the value of the treasure myself, it was so great!"

The doctor and Nick looked at each other. The dying man on the bed, lying between them, actually cackled a feeble laugh.

"They do not believe me!" he whispered, "And yet I am a man going soon to my Maker, and I hope to be buried in consecrated ground. With this hope

I say to you that my treasure was so great that I never found time to count it all."

"It was in money—ancient money, much of it. Doubloons of early mintage, pieces of eight, French and Portuguese coins of eleven, twelve, and thirteen hundred. There were many coins of later date, too, of course. And, then, there was my own individual fortune that I had honestly made in commerce and saved from my salary as President of Honduria. I have ever been a frugal man—not a miser, but frugal."

"The greater part of the treasure, as you must know, was buried by a famous Spanish pirate in a certain cave on the coast of what is now Eastern Honduria. And although he robbed many vessels to gain his wealth, there was also in the loot the honestly acquired hoard of a treasure ship, bound from the golden shore of Mexico about the time of Columbus' final voyage, which was wrecked on a Caribbean key and lay buried in the sand until the pirate, hundreds of years afterward, careened his vessel there and chanced upon the buried galley."

"This is the story of the treasure, Mr. Carter," breathed Alvarez stammeringly. "How it came originally into my possession does not matter. But, believe me, my hands are free of blood, or of robbery. The treasure is as honestly mine as these poor things are mine which you see about you."

"The sum, however, is enormous. It is millions of money! And that treasure I have kept for a definite purpose. Cecile knows that purpose. Cecile will use the treasure aright if she can obtain it. And that she will try to get at it is the expectation of my enemies now. That is why they have killed me," whispered Alvarez, his voice growing fainter. "It is their only hope!"

The expression of his face changed. The mouth twisted a bit at the corner. He struggled to speak again, and finally there burst from his writhing lips the cry:

"God! The pain! It is worse than I feared. Cecile, how your mother must have suffered, child!"

Doctor Monteith raised his head and shoulders with one arm and put the glass to Alvarez's lips again, but the man's chattering teeth shattered the glass and the antidote was spilled over the bedclothing.

As the physician darted up to prepare more of the drug, the dying man wagged his head again, and a horrible, ghostly cackle of laughter issued from his twisted mouth.

"No use! Futile!" he exploded the words in a thin, rasping voice, like so many rifle cartridges.

Then he looked at Nick again.

"Carter! Your ear!"

The detective bent close over him, and the dying man's lips were at his ear. Into the orifice shot the following disconnected phrases—words that were burned upon the detective's memory for long afterward:

"Find! Señora Valdez! Ask! Pedro Salazar!"

Stuffed packet! Gave him! Came aboard! Command! Nineteen-two!"

His whispering died away. The doctor hurried back to the bed with another glass. He looked suspiciously at Nick as he raised the patient again.

At the moment, Cecile hurried into the room once more. Behind her was a priest for whom she had sent Pop-eye. As the clergyman began his holy office the already glazed eyes of Manuel Alvarez, once President of Honduria, closed.

CHAPTER VI.

CECILE.

Nick Carter turned out the gas in the parlor, and allowed the cold early light of morning to enter through the two front windows of the flat. It was two hours later. The priest had gone. The doctor had likewise departed after a few words in private with Miss Dubois. All was now in charge of the concave.

Because Cecile Dubois had shown such self-possession and control, Nick had remained for a final talk with her before going home, although he had long since sent Pop-eye back to Rutgers Street.

Now the thoughtful young woman brought in a tray on which was a pot of tea and some bread and butter sandwiches, and invited the detective to taste. He accepted the tea and quaffed a cup slowly as he watched her prepare her own cup. Her hand did not shake. She was pallid, but in perfect control of herself.

"Miss Dubois," Nick said, carefully balancing his cup and looking at her steadily, "I am going to cross-examine you. Are you ready for the ordeal?"

"Must you?" she asked, and she evidently shrank from the ordeal.

"If I am to follow out Señor Alvarez's wishes—if I am to punish his enemies—his murderers—if I am to recover his hidden treasure—if all these things are to be brought about through my instrumentality, I must know all that you can tell me; and the quicker I know it, the better."

"But have I not told you—"

"Nothing about yourself," interrupted Nick. "I must know who you are. Your face is familiar to me. Your name is not."

She flushed, then, deeply, and the tears sprang to her eyes. She murmured:

"My poor mother!" and fell to weeping silently. But this was only for a minute. Soon she dashed away the tears and faced the detective again.

"Is it really necessary?" she asked.

"Quite."

Like a swimmer taking a leap into icy water, she drew in one shuddering breath and then expelled it with the words:

"I am the daughter of Lucile Moritz—Lucile

Moritz, the dancer—Lucile Moritz, who was the rage and the belle of New Orleans twenty-five years ago."

Nick had started at the name, and he smote his forehead with one palm.

"That is it!" he murmured. "You are the image of your mother, Miss Cecile."

"Yes. Only my mother was a beauty, and I am too dark to be beautiful! She was brilliant; I am merely sallow. She had vivacity, life, sparkle! I was born under a cloud, as it were; and I have been under that cloud ever since," sighed the girl.

She sipped her tea languidly, and Nick, for the moment, forbore the cross-questioning.

"Lucile Moritz—her name, really, was Morris; she was of Jewish descent—married a Frenchman named Dubois. At least, she went through a ceremony honestly enough on her part; but later—several years later—a woman who had a prior claim upon the scoundrel came from France to New Orleans and proved she was his wife. He was a rascal, that father of mine!" exclaimed Cecile bitterly.

"Lucile drifted after that," she continued, speaking of her mother in a queerly impersonal way, as though she were relating history instead of private matters. "Her heart was not broken, for she had been disillusioned about Dubois before his first wife came across the ocean to claim him. But her pride was broken—and that was worse.

"And she could not command the furore she once aroused in the theatrical world. She had lost caste by marrying and leaving the stage, and she would not allow the press agents to blare her trouble with Dubois broadcast in order to advertise her return to the boards. She thought of me—poor mother!

"So she did not do well. Then General D'Conyer came into our lives. Ah! He was a greater villain—he is a greater villain—than Dubois."

"This is the D'Conyer who pretty well sways affairs in Honduria to-day?" queried Nick.

"Yes. But his time will come," declared the girl, with emphasis.

"You hope to see his government overthrown?"

"I live for that," declared Cecile Dubois simply.

"And how did he come into your mother's life?" asked the detective.

"He had been sent away from Honduria. He was always a disturbing element for years in the republic. But Señor Alvarez was too lenient with him."

"He only scotched the snake, eh?"

"He should have punished him as any other government in all South America would have done for his first open rebellion. Instead, D'Conyer was free to work against the president from the safety of this country. He was in New Orleans, and in touch with a small disaffected party in Honduria—mostly the negro class, for D'Conyer—although he denies it—has a taint of African blood in his veins."

"It was while he was hatching this revolution that your mother met him?" inquired Nick.

"Yes. He professed himself enamored of her.

He visited us often. He could dissemble. He professed to love me, too, as a daughter. Poor, foolish, Lucile Moritz! She believed another man," said Cecile. "She was one of those women doomed to be the dupes of ignoble men."

"How old were you at this time?" queried Nick.

"I was seven. It was between twelve and thirteen years ago. Lucile married D'Conyer in St. James Parish. We sailed for Honduras in a filibustering vessel almost at once. We landed on a dreary and almost uninhabited coast and went at once into the mountainous interior, for that is where D'Conyer and his friends were to establish their headquarters."

"But there was no rebellion as long ago as that in Honduras," said Nick, in surprise.

"True. He could not gather the people at that time. He was years in creating disaffection among the people—poor fools!" exclaimed Cecile. "And this is the point of my story, Mr. Carter. It deals with D'Conyer's terrible cruelty to my mother and myself, and shows the sort of a villain he is. He inspired this murder-at-night!" and she pointed toward the room in which the dead man lay.

Nick nodded and waited patiently for her to continue.

"He took us into the heart of the country, as I say. Rougher than the mountains were the people who surrounded us. Almost all that first gathered to D'Conyer's standard were blacks. We began to suspect, then, that he had the taint in his blood.

"Despite the disappointments and mistakes of Lucile Moritz's life, her pride of blood was great. Her family had held a high place in Louisiana for generations. It horrified her to imagine what this man she had married might really be!

"He was cruel to all about him—he ruled by force; but there was somebody who ruled him. This was a wild black woman who met us when we reached the camp in the mountains. She was the daughter of a slave. Her mother had come direct from Africa with this female child slung around her neck. She was as untamed as her mother had been, and handsome as a statue of bronze.

"She insulted Lucile Moritz, and D'Conyer laughed. She beat me, and D'Conyer laughed.

"You must get used to Miranda," he coolly said to us. "She always bosses my house when I am here."

"But broken in pride as Lucile Moritz was, she would not submit to such an infamy as this. She declared her intention of starting at once for Santa Luca. There were enough decent men in the party of rebels to offer to escort us. But D'Conyer forbade our going. He feared we would betray him to the dictator.

"Lucile Moritz retired, with me, to a hut by herself on the outskirts of the camp. One morning I saw the black woman, Miranda, bringing a pan of milk along the mountain path. She carefully set it down before our door, and laughed, and went away.

"I was hungry and cried for the milk, although at

first Lucile did not intend to receive the gift. But when I had importuned her, she could not resist, and she went for the pan.

"As she lifted it, an asp dropped from the rim upon her arm—and stung her!

"We had not been warned about the deadly little beasts. They were not common. I believe Miranda placed the creature there intentionally.

"While we stood there, Lucile more surprised than frightened by the bite of the serpent, a clattering cavalcade rode suddenly out of a defile and swept by us with shouts toward the rebel camp. It was an attacking party of the government forces, and with them rode the dictator himself.

"He saw us. He saw the writhing serpent on the ground and Lucile holding her arm, and saw me standing by, crying.

"He leaped from his horse and allowed his men to go on without him. He saw what had happened, and he broke the terrible truth to Lucile. He remained with her to the end, and he swore to her that I should have a daughter's care. That was the good heart of the man," and Cecile broke into sobs again and her story was stayed.

Finally Nick Carter asked:

"And you have been his care, and he has been yours, ever since?"

"Yes." She smiled faintly through her tears. "He has been more than a father to me. I have tried to be a daughter to him. And now he is dead."

"What do you know about this treasure of the dictator?"

She started and looked at Nick shrewdly. "What do you ask?"

"It will be my duty to try and find it for you. It was the request on his lips when—when he ceased speaking," said the detective.

"Oh, Mr. Carter! will you help me in that great work?"

"Understand me," said Nick firmly. "I know nothing about the plans of Señor Alvarez saving that he made a will in your favor, and that he trusted to me what I suppose to be the clue to the discovery of his hidden fortune. It is to be yours. Your purposes with it are immaterial. I will find the fortune for you, just as I will bring to justice, if possible, the enemies who compassed his death."

She gave him her hand with quick warmth.

"You are a man to trust, I know!" she cried.

"How can I help you?"

"Did you ever hear of Señora Valdez?"

"No."

"There was no such lady in Señor Alvarez's confidence?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"He was unmarried?"

"His wife was dead before he took me into his home. He had no relatives. He was a singularly lonely man, given up entirely to his country and his people."

"I begin to believe that he was an oddity among South American dictators," muttered Nick.

Then he asked: "What do you know of Pedro Salazar?"

"Oh, Pedro!" she exclaimed, and smiled. "He is, indeed, a faithful, if unwise, friend of the cause."

"The 'cause' being the reestablishment of the Alvarez government in Honduras?"

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

"Where is Salazar now?"

"I do not know."

"When did you last see him?"

"Some five years ago."

"What was he then?"

"A sailor, as always."

"Ah! commander of a vessel?" asked Nick, remembering the broken words of the dictator at the end.

"He once commanded a vessel, I know. It was one that Señor Alvarez had given him. Pedro worshipped the president."

"Indeed. And what has become of his vessel?"

"She was wrecked. To tell the truth, Pedro tried to start a revolution in Honduras in Señor Alvarez's name."

"It was unsuccessful?"

"Yes. Because his vessel, carrying supplies and ammunition for the insurgents, was wrecked. It was caught in a hurricane. I understand, and carried by a tidal wave fairly ashore on a wild part of the coast."

"The seacoast of Honduras?"

"Yes."

"And this was five years ago?"

"Yes."

"I will have that looked up," said Nick thoughtfully. "But you can tell me nothing about Señora Valdez?"

"I do not know the lady."

"Señor Alvarez mentioned her name. It is important, perhaps. You would trust this Pedro?"

"Indeed, yes," declared the girl, with anxiety.

"Did you have no way of learning what has become of him?"

"No. He was here last after the failure of his expedition. He went away declaring that we should not hear of him again until he had gained enough fortune to enable him to finance another insurrection in the president's favor."

"And yet Señor Alvarez had it in his power to discover this treasure that he was so earnest about?"

"I do not understand that," said Cecile frankly.

"He never spoke to Pedro about the treasure. He did not believe, you see, that the time was ripe for a revolution in Honduras, and Pedro was impulsive. All he made Pedro do was to tell him particularly about the wreck of his vessel—"

"What was her name?"

"Why—er—really I do not know," said the girl slowly. "I never remember of having heard the name. It is a little odd, perhaps. And Señor Alvarez was not clear about the wreck of it, too."

"About the wreck? What do you mean?"

She looked a little confused, but then rallied and said frankly:

"I suppose I may tell you everything, Mr. Carter. I see no connection between your inquiry and this fact; but the señor, after Pedro was gone, drew a map of the spot where the wreck lies."

"Indeed!" cried Nick wonderingly.

"He gave it to me. I have it now."

"May I see it?"

She turned a little aside, and drew from her bosom a rather large flat locket, perfectly plain, and which opened by pressure on a secret spring. Nick watched her draw forth from the shallow locket a much folded piece of paper. Before he took it in his hand, he asked her quietly:

"Was it *your* idea to keep the map in that hiding place, Miss Dubois?"

"No. Señor Alvarez gave me the locket and the map together."

"And told you to wear them?"

"Yes. He said it was important. I do not know why."

"Let me see the map," said Nick, after a moment's thought.

He spread it flat on the little stand at his elbow. It was light enough now for him to see the thing plainly. It was a distinctly drawn outline of a coast that was evidently rocky. The degrees of latitude and longitude were marked plainly. A cross indicated the spot where the vessel commanded by Pedro Salazar had been driven ashore, and this spot seemed to be in an estuary, or ravine in the high and rocky shore. The place was distant from any seaport of Honduras.

"May I take this, or copy it?" asked Nick.

"Certainly. I trust everything to you, Mr. Carter," she said.

"Very well. We have finished with this topic for the present, then. We must turn now, Miss Dubois, to a more painful subject," said the detective.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENEMY.

"You have thought," said Nick slowly, after a moment, "that I might suspect Doctor Monteith of having had a hand in putting that poisonous serpent on the balcony yonder?"

"I know. But it would have been impossible."

"He was trying to listen to our conversation while Señor Alvarez lay in his stupor," said Nick bluntly.

"That was because he was jealous," declared the girl, blushing faintly. "He did not know who you were at the time. He told me so just now before he went home, and begged my pardon for listening."

"Indeed!" said Nick. "Well, let us drop Doctor Monteith for the moment, although I bear him in mind

still. You see, that milk-bottle cover was punctured so that the milk would ooze out and attract the asp."

"But whoever put the serpent there did that."

"That is possible, of course. And if not the doctor, who?"

"You wish me to state my suspicions?"

"You have stated them generally," returned Nick. "I would like you to particularize. You stated that his enemies had committed the crime. Name the enemy."

"General D'Conyer."

"But he is in Honduras."

"And he has a long arm."

"You mean that D'Conyer instigated this crime?"

"The party of which he is the leader has done its all to break Señor Alvarez down. They have even offered to sell him the presidency of Honduras again for the treasure which they have learned is worth more than all the concessions, developed and undeveloped, which the suffering republic possesses."

"It must be a great treasure," said Nick reflectively.

"Señor Alvarez assured me that it was so, and he never told me a lie."

"Well. State the actual people whom you suspect."

"There is a man named Reiffe who represents D'Conyer, I believe, in the capacity of secret service agent."

"He was watching Señor Alvarez and yourself?"

"I have seen him frequently when I have ventured out. And even Pedro warned me of him as long ago as the time he was here last. He declared that Reiffe knew where his vessel was wrecked, and that Reiffe and others gained possession of the cargo Pedro had suffered so much to get to Honduras."

"This Reiffe is in New York now?"

"That I cannot tell for sure. But I can give you a photograph of him. If he is here you will find him in some of the little hotels where many of these South Americans stay."

She went to the desk, unlocked a drawer, and brought Nick a faded photograph of a black-bearded man with very small eyes, a determined jaw, and thin, close lips—a man who looked as though he never let a word escape him until he had weighed it in the scales of caution!

He was dressed in a uniform that Nick supposed must be that of the Hondurian army, and was evidently a colonel of foot.

"This is the actual enemy whom you believe placed the viper where it would of a surety sting poor Alvarez?" asked Nick.

"I believe he planned the crime. He may not have appeared in its performance. Nobody may have ever seen him about this house. But he worked out the details, I have no doubt, although D'Conyer must himself have suggested the manner of the señor's death."

"Don't you see?" cried the girl. "He would remember how Lucile Moritz died, poor thing, and he

would have thought out the scheme of having his enemy die in the same way. D'Conyer is a spectacular villain. Oh, I could tell you of some of the things he has done that would set even you, cool man that you are, afire!"

"But Reiffe may have had assistants perform the actual crime—the bringing of the serpent here and puncturing the milk-bottle cover?"

"More than likely," admitted the girl, calming down again.

"Then, why not Doctor Monteith?" queried Nick curiously.

"You harp upon that, Mr. Carter!" she cried hotly.

"And I cannot shake your woman's intuition?" he asked.

"No. The doctor *could not* have lent himself to such a crime."

Nick looked at her levelly. "You are in love with Doctor Monteith," he accused her.

She started, flushed, and then paled. Her black eyes glittered with anger.

"How dare you, Mr. Carter?" she cried. "Has my frankness given you any right to say such a thing?"

"Whether you admit it or not," pursued Nick coolly, "it is so. You love this doctor."

"You are offensive!"

"No. I wanted to be sure. I tell you frankly, if you really cared as little for him as you tried to lead me to suppose, I would have arrested him at once."

"Oh, Mr. Carter!" she cried, clasping her hands and forgetting her outraged dignity in her fright at the statement.

"See! I am right," declared Nick. "I will not arrest him."

"But you have no reason," she cried.

"A very good one."

"Name it!" she challenged.

"To lull the real criminals into a belief that they were unsuspected—at least, for a time."

"You could not be so cruel."

"I would not be if I was not already half assured that the doctor *might* have lent himself to the plot, being so jealous of Señor Alvarez."

"I do not believe he is in the faintest degree connected with the murder of that good man," reiterated Miss Dubois.

"But do not say again that you do not love him," said Nick dryly; "you do. I will take care what I do to him for your sake. The hole in the milk-bottle cover is what puzzles me," and he took up the round pasteboard cap and studied it again.

"Granted that it would be easy enough for an enemy to drop the little snake from the edge of the roof into the box where the milk bottle stood, *how* could he reach down and puncture the cap? Of course, there was no hole in this pasteboard when you put the milk outside?"

"Certainly not."

"You are positive?"

"Positive," said the girl decidedly.

"And I do not see how one could reach down with any long instrument—a spear, for instance—and tap the cap of the bottle so lightly that the pasteboard would be punctured, and the whole cap not crushed and driven into the mouth of the bottle.

"It was a delicate operation. Otherwise, dim as the light was out there, Señor Alvarez must have noticed the disarrangement of the cap when he stooped to pick the bottle up. Do you see?"

The girl nodded. "It is indeed a puzzle. But the doctor——"

"Very well. We will eliminate him," said Nick, with a smile. "For the present, at least. I will take this cap with me, Miss Dubois. You must need rest. I have some inquiries to make of the janitor and others. And then—by the way, I have not been to bed myself this night!"

"You are very kind to take so much trouble, Mr. Carter. Unless the treasure comes to light there will be very little money with which to pay you, sir, for your activities."

"Then it behooves me to find the dictator's treasure, as well as his murderers," declared the detective grimly. "But I have a feeling, Miss Dubois, that I shall find both."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MILK-BOTTLE CAP.

"And do you really believe this Doctor Monteith knows anything about the murder, Nick?" asked Chickering Carter, later.

"I do not. I was faintly suspicious at first; but I believe his manner when he came in, and his treatment of me, was inspired entirely by jealousy. He is probably a prudish, finicky chap; he did not consider it quite decent for Miss Dubois to live with a man who was no relative to her. He would have been a jealous of an Egyptian mummy, in all probability," and Nick laughed as he lit his cigar.

"It was after luncheon. The detective had slept for several hours after his night's work. But before sleeping he had set Patsy and Adelina Garvan the task of looking up all the Hondurians in the city, and especially inquired them to look for the two men, Reiffe and Pedro Alvarez—one the enemy, the other the friend, of the murdered Señor Alvarez, once dictator of the Hondurian Republic.

He needed Chick for a different matter in connection with the case, and to his first assistant he had related at length all the details of his discoveries since the woman's scream had halted he and Pop-eye on Fourteenth Street the evening before.

"And I took the pains to look up the character of the janitor of the building. He might have been in contact with the enemies of Alvarez. But he bears an excellent reputation.

"I showed the janitor the picture of Reiffe. He had never seen such a man. Nobody had been hanging about the house. Nobody had asked him regarding Alvarez, whom he considered a model tenant—until he was murdered. Then it got into his Dutch mind that Alvarez must have been somehow queer, or he wouldn't have been killed, and, therefore, made so much trouble about the house!" and Nick chuckled.

"It strikes me, therefore, that the enemies of Alvarez must have watched him, and gained a working knowledge of his habits, from some point at a distance—say across the street."

"How about the servant girl?" asked Chick.

"She's a Swede. I saw her when she came into the flat this morning. She is a large, lymphatic person, with just sense enough to do her work, but too dull to be of value to the plotters. She hasn't an idea above her dinner and her 'fellar,'" declared Nick. "She's out of it.

"But I learned, from the cop on the beat, there are several families of Spanish-Americans in the neighborhood. Some live across the street from the flat in which Alvarez resided. We can scarcely pin one of these persons down to the thing, unless we get evidence against him. He might have watched night after night, through a glass, until he learned the habits of Alvarez regarding his nightcap of lacteal fluid."

"But the snake could not have been thrown across the street!" cried Chick.

"Scarcely."

"And a man climbing up the fire escape would be sure to attract attention."

"Exactly."

"The same objection can be claimed if we suggest the murderer having come from another apartment in the same house?"

"You are right."

"So, there remains the roof?" asked Chick.

"Yet the janitor proved to me that the scuttle had not been opened for weeks. The clotheslines are attached to pulleys from the rear hall window of each floor, and the families take turns at them. Nobody ever goes to the roof."

"Therefore——"

"Therefore," said Nick, with decision, "the serpent, if dropped from the roof, was brought there by a person who came over the roofs from some other house in the row. Which would be easy enough."

"Undoubtedly," admitted his assistant.

"That much we can easily understand," pursued the chief. "But the puncturing of this milk-bottle cap is another matter!"

He placed the round bit of pasteboard on the table between them. Almost in the centre of the thick cap was a round hole. It was not perfectly round, though; on the under side the pasteboard was cracked and broken unevenly. Chick, who picked it up and looked on the under side, said:

"Looks as though a small calibre bullet had been shot through it."

"And how about the bottle?" chuckled Nick. "A pistol bullet would rather shatter the bottle, eh?"

"Of course."

"And a spear, of any kind long enough to reach from the roof's edge to the bottle as it rested in the box, must have torn the cap all to pieces. The hole shows that it was made with no very keen instrument. It took considerable pressure to puncture the thick pasteboard."

"And nobody could reach the balcony," grunted Chick.

"Not without being seen."

"A man working on the edge of the roof would be seen, too."

"Not so likely. That house is higher by a story than the houses across the street. The parapet would hide the man most of the time, saving when he leaned over to puncture the bottle cap, or to drop the snake."

"Of course," admitted Chick, "he ran a smaller chance of being seen from the street, too, than he would had he deliberately climbed the fire escape, either from below, or from one of the neighboring apartments."

"Quite right."

"It's a puzzle, Nick."

"All the more reason for our solving it. And in solving it we may gain some idea of the kind of a man who did it, even if we do not at once strike the man himself."

"But I don't see how you are going to solve it?"

"Come, Chick, let us never say die!" exclaimed the chief. "There is always our old way of getting in touch with the mind and method of a criminal."

"Eh? You mean?"

"Let us each suppose himself the man who wished to compass Señor Alvarez's death. We have agreed that he must have worked from the roof. Now, Chick, consider yourself on the edge of that roof, with the bottle of milk in the box below you, the deadly little adder handy, and a necessity for letting a few drops of milk out of the bottle so as to attract the serpent to the bottle when you dropped the creature in the box."

Chick smiled, leaned back in his chair, and closed his eyes. Nick watched him as the smoke floated upward in rings from his cigar and an expression came over the older detective's countenance that showed he was thinking a deal more about the young man—his very first protégé and assistant—than of the subject under discussion.

"Well?" Nick asked, after a few silent moments.

"Nick," said the younger detective, "I'll have to go back a good deal farther than the edge of that roof, if I am to get into touch with this guy's mind and method. He would have every part of his scheme thought out long before the moment of putting it into operation."

"Right. The crime was premeditated, and even a warm night selected to carry it into execution."

"Then he would also have foreseen the difficulty of opening the bottle of milk sufficiently to attract the serpent to it."

"Sure."

"How high was the edge of the roof from the floor of the balcony?"

"Quite twelve feet."

"Say I am the criminal," said Chick. "I would have had to carry a long spear to have reached the bottle."

"If it was a spear."

"An extension fishing rod—no?"

"Possibly. But unless it was a very stiff one it would not have worked."

"I wouldn't have brought any rod or pole there, Nick!" declared Chick suddenly.

"Why?"

"Too bulky; too awkward. In the way, either of them. For you say that house is higher than its neighbors?"

"Higher than those across the street. And—yes—a story above those on either side of it. I remember noticing that," admitted Nick.

"Then how did he reach the roof at all?"

"A ladder. That was easy. I believe I will let you go down there and look the place over," said Nick, smiling. "You are sure you would not have transfixed the bottle cover with a spear-point?"

"Not if I'd been the fellow with the snake."

"All right, Chick. Run down to Fourteenth Street. I'll scratch you a line to Miss Dubois. And you can use your police badge to encourage the janitor to let you on the roof."

"Meanwhile," Nick said, "I have something to look up regarding the wreck of a filibustering expedition that happened some five years ago. I must see 'Ironsides' O'Brien. There hasn't been such an expedition sailed from any Atlantic or gulf port for the last two decades that old Ironsides hasn't either been in, or known all about."

The detectives separated, and we will follow Chick, who had the more direct inquiry regarding the murder of Señor Manuel Alvarez, in hand.

Chick went to the scene of the murder, but at first he did not try to meet Miss Dubois. Instead he obtained the janitor's permission to visit the roof. The janitor, who was much disturbed over the happening of the night before, accompanied him and watched all he did from the edge of the scuttle, as though he believed Chick might be contemplating another murder himself.

Chick followed those methods taught him so long ago by his chief in the scrutiny of a given area. Nick Carter looking for traces left by a criminal did not act like a scout, or an Indian, on the trail—by no means! There was no darting about from one spot to another, comparing one mark with similar marks elsewhere, or looking for pebbles or other

small objects which had been disturbed by the passing of feet.

Fortunately there had been no snow on the ground, the remarkable warmth of this midwinter spell having melted every bit of it.

The janitor remained at the scuttle because Chick requested him not to come out upon the roof until he had made his investigations complete. First the detective mentally divided the area of the roof into squares, and he carefully looked over these squares, one at a time, for any article dropped by the man whom he believed, with Nick, had compassed Señor Alvarez's death.

Patiently did Chick move about, his eyes fastened upon the gravel, picking up, or turning over with his foot, every scrap of paper, or bit of wood, or piece of foreign matter which he saw. Nothing escaped his keen vision; but nothing came to light which seemed to have been brought there by the man whose identity he wished to discover.

Then he examined the front coping of brownstone, for the house had been built before the day of metal cornices. Chick began at the western end and worked toward the east. When he arrived at a spot over the balcony on which the two windows of Alvarez's parlor opened, he halted and scrutinized the edges of the stone more closely.

There were certain scratches that looked fresh to the eye of Chick. Below as he stooped over the coping, was the box in which the bottle of milk had been set. It looked as though the buttons of the man's coat, or vest, might have made these scratches.

But there were no other marks here.

Chick traveled around the other sides of the roof, going slowly and looking both on the inner side, and the outside, of the coping for marks. On the east side he found several at a spot about midway of the length of the house.

The capstone of the coping extended on both sides over the brickwork, thus shedding the water. Under this capstone on the inner side were several sharply defined scratches in the brick, and on the under side of the stone itself.

Chick was not long in coming to the conclusion that the murderer of Alvarez had not used a ladder to reach this roof from the one below, but had thrown up a rope, to which a three or four-pronged anchor was attached, and the prongs of this anchor had hooked under the edge of the coping stone.

Then the murderer, who must have been an agile fellow, walked up the side of the house and so arrived on the roof. Had he done this, a long spear—or even a folding fishing rod—would have been much in his way. Chick was even less inclined than before to believe that he speared the milk-bottle cover from the edge of the roof.

Still putting himself in the place of the other fellow, as Nick had advised, he walked back to the front coping and looked down. If he had gotten up here by the aid of a rope he would, of course, have the

rope with him. That rope might have come in handy for something beside gaining this elevation from the roof below!

After a while Chick told the janitor he was through for the present, and they went down. The young man rang the muffled bell of the Alvarez flat, and Miss Dubois herself came to the door. Chick presented Nick's note of introduction, and the beautiful young woman invited him into the parlor.

"May I step out upon the balcony and look about a bit?" asked Chick, and, being accorded the privilege, he did so. He saw the round stain made by the bottom of the bottle in the box.

"Of course," he said to Miss Dubois, "you were careful to wipe the bottle when you put it out here for the señor's use at night?"

"It came directly off the ice which we take all winter, and was wet. It was my habit to dry it before I left the kitchen—yes," she replied.

"And you did so last night?"

"Yes."

"And the little milk that oozed out of the hole in the cap would not have run down the bottle and made that stain," murmured Chick. Suddenly he flashed the punctured cap upon Miss Debois.

"Do you take milk of that company?" he asked her.

"That is the Alexander & Pebble Co. No, sir; I take milk from Worden's."

"Then this cap did not come off of the bottle that you placed on the fire escape last evening?"

"Most certainly not," said Cecile Dubois firmly.

Chick immediately bowed himself out of the flat. He had a great big idea in his mind—one that had first been suggested to him when he was on the roof.

Pop-eye had found the milk-bottle cap on the floor of the little parlor and had given it to Nick. They had accepted it as the cap of the bottle that had been broken—and undoubtedly it was such.

But the bottle that was broken was not the bottle that Miss Dubois had set out upon the fire escape.

CHAPTER IX.

A MATTER OF IDENTITY.

Here was the gist of Chick Carter's discovery. Making it the basis of further developments, he went ahead with the line of reasoning that it had started.

One bottle of milk had been substituted for another. Miss Dubois had placed a Worden bottle on the fire escape; but the bottle Alvarez had picked up, and to which the poisonous viper clung, had been bought of the Alexander & Pebble Company.

In addition, the bottle Miss Dubois had placed on the fire escape had been taken from the refrigerator, it is true; but it was wiped dry before being placed outside the window. The bottle Alvarez had picked up some time later was wet on the outside.

Presumably that bottle had been recently taken off the ice, and *not* wiped. Chick took a walk around the neighborhood. He naturally went east. The murderer of Alvarez had reached the roof of the house from that side.

Around on Second Avenue Chick soon came upon a butter and egg store. On the window was lettered in white: "Agency for the Alexander & Pebble Milk Company."

Chick went in and entered into conversation with the clerk in charge. He gleaned that the young man had been on duty the evening before. How late did the store keep open? Until near eleven o'clock. The boss hated to lose a customer, and there were lots of furnished lodgings in the neighborhood in which the people did "light housekeeping."

"Our evening trade is sometimes the best of the whole day," admitted the clerk.

"Was it good last evening, for instance?" queried Chick curiously.

"We had some customers."

"Did you know them all?"

"Pshaw! no; there are a good many people in here every day that I never see again."

"Who was the man who came in late last night—it must have been after ten o'clock—and bought a bottle of milk? He wanted it off the ice, too. Think of it—this time of year."

"Why, hello!" exclaimed the clerk, eying Chick with surprise. "There was such a man."

"I know it."

"I remember him because he was a foreigner, and he was particular about having the bottle cold."

"Who was he?"

"Never saw him before."

Chick had examined the photograph of Colonel Reiffe that Miss Dubois had given Nick Carter, and he now described the Hondurian exactly.

"That might have been your party," admitted the clerk. "I wasn't so particular in going over him, though. He was dark, had a closely cropped black beard, and he spoke with an accent."

"It is near enough for my purpose. Did you see which way he went?"

"Directly across the street and into that house," said the clerk, pointing.

Chick saw no reason why a person could not reach the roof of the house where Alvarez had lived, from the roof of the one in question. He went over directly and found the janitor of the building engaged in sweeping the hall.

"Have you a flat to let?" asked Chick, in a business-like way.

"Just one, mister—if you want a furnished flat."

"How much is it?"

"Seven-fifty a week. Three rooms and bath. Top floor."

"The only one you have?"

"That's right," said the janitor. "And that house been on my hands half a day yet. The fact is, the folks

that had it were entitled to another day's occupation of the place, but they left town early this morning."

Chick had a premonition, and said quickly:

"Were they Spanish people—or Spanish-American?"

"Why, I think they were. But they were nice folks—and clean as wax. I have been fixing up the room, and I assure you they were all right. Mr. Mondrego was alone for the last week. His wife and children went away before he did."

"But he was here last night?"

"Say! do you want to hire a flat, or do you want to pump me about Mondrego?" asked the janitor suspiciously.

"Both, perhaps," admitted Chick, laughing. He passed the man a banknote and said significantly:

"That is to bind the bargain about the flat—for a day, at least. Sight unseen, too. Do you mind answering a few questions about the former tenant now?"

"Not at all, mister!" declared the janitor.

"This Mondrego was a married man?"

"With a nice little wife—a little black-eyed beauty she was—and two children. Boy and girl, seven and nine, about. Dressed well. The wife always wore her jewels, and my wife said they were worth more than this whole house. Sarah's father is in the diamond business, and she knows."

"And what manner of man was Mondrego?"

"In looks?"

"Yes," replied the detective.

"A little man; but quick as a cat and quite peculiar. His manner always reminded me of a cat—or a sailor."

"A beard?"

"No. Smooth-faced. Very little hair. So bald, in fact, that he ought to tie a string around his head so as to tell how far up to wash his face!" and the janitor laughed at his own joke.

To himself, Chick said: "He is the man, who, if the trick, I'll be bound!"

Aloud, he said: "Mondrego was here alone last night, then?"

"He slept here. Gave up the keys at seven o'clock this morning."

"Nobody else with him?"

"Not when he went away."

"Last night?"

"I did not see him last evening."

"Did he ever have a visitor, a man——" and Chick went on to describe Colonel Reiffe, General Deane's representative in New York.

"Oh! I've seen a gentleman like that who came to see the Mondregos."

"Often?"

"Not lately. But several times when they first came here to live."

"How long did they remain with you?"

"Fourteen weeks."

"All right. Now, can I see the flat?"

"Sure," said the man, and led the way upstairs.

There were three flats on a floor. The Mondregos had occupied one of the rear apartments. There was a stairway from the top floor to the roof, on which the tenants could dry their clothes, if they wished. It was no trick for the plotters to reach this roof, then, and go over the intervening roofs to the house in which Alvarez had lived.

Later, Chick reported to his chief as follows:

"That Mondrego is a sailor, or has been one, of course. It was no trick for him to climb the sheer wall of the higher flat house by the aid of his rope and hook. Then he had something that he could let down and fish up the bottle of milk Miss Dubois set outside the window.

"For fear that bottle would be broken Reiffe went out and bought for him the fresh bottle from the dairy. The hole was punched in the cap of that second bottle before it was let down. Then the poisonous serpent was dropped into the box, too.

"Like enough Mondrego threw down his hook and line upon the lower roof and lowered himself by his hands over the coping, dropping to the other roof. It would only be a five foot drop, or less. He could do it—and did it! Then they took their time in getting away."

Nick concurred with this solving of the puzzle on Chick's part. But he made no further move in the case until Patsy and Adelina presented their report at dinner that evening.

Adelina, who was a Spanish-American herself, had made several calls among families whom she knew from South America, and who lodged at the hotels near or on Fourteenth Street. Patsy, meantime, had been engaged in hunting for a man in the less respectable haunts of a certain class of exiles from the Spanish-American republics.

Adelina had gathered the names of several Hondurians who were in town. Included in them was that of Colonel Reiffe. She had heard of the Mondregos. But they had not left the city, as the janitor of the flat where they had lived for some weeks reported to Chick. Instead, they were living in a quiet hotel on Second Avenue; at least, Señora Mondrego and her children were.

Mondrego was an officer on a freight steamship plying between Baltimore and South American ports. He was not usually in New York for more than a day or two at a time. Señora Mondrego was supposed to be a cousin of Reiffe, who was a leader among the few Hondurians in the city.

This gossip served merely to aid Nick Carter in getting in touch with the people who would be likely to have an interest, one way or another, in the death of Manuel Alvarez.

And his murder had been the main topic of conversation among all the people whom Adelina had talked with. Even the newspapers had not been sure that the ex-dictator of Honduras had been murdered; but the Hondurians themselves had never doubted it!

Patsy had looked for Pedro Salazar. It was known that Pedro, after the loss of his vessel on the coast of Honduras, when he was running ammunition and arms for the insurgents, had been obliged to ship as a common sailor. His old-time friends had rather lost sight of him, it seemed, and Patsy had not brought in much definite information about the man.

"Never mind," said Nick cheerfully. "I expect a visitor this evening who will be able to throw some light on Pedro Salazar—and, perhaps, on some other puzzling circumstances regarding this murder, and the hidden treasure of the dead dictator. By the way, Adelina, did you manage to identify Señora Valdez?"

"No," said Patsy's wife, shaking her head. "Nobody whom I spoke to ever heard of that lady."

"And, of course, you did not learn anything about her?" asked Nick of Garvan.

"Not a thing. She evidently didn't train with the crowd I've been after."

At that moment Joseph, who had left the room after putting the nuts and cheese and coffee on the table, returned. He spoke to Nick softly.

"There is a one-armed man at the door. I can't make out what he wants, Mr. Carter. He doesn't know who he wants to see, it seems, but he had this letter which he says he received, making an appointment for him to call at this number on Madison Avenue."

Nick smiled and nodded when he saw the letter.

"My own letter," he said, to his friends. "A one-armed man, you say?"

"That's old Ironsides!" cried Chick quickly.

"It is O'Brien. I was afraid he would not come if I gave him my name. He might fear he was being trapped. He's a cautious old rat, is Ironsides. Show him into the study, Joseph. I will be up at once."

CHAPTER X.

THE FILIBUSTER.

"Old Ironsides" O'Brien was a character whom Nick had run up against before now. Sometimes Nick had found the old filibuster hard to manage, for he was as suspicious as a coyote, and had lived so many years in a haze of mystery and intrigue that if a man offered him a good cigar he always sounded its depths with a wire before he attempted to smoke it!

In the first place, as his name announced to all the world, he was an Irishman. And he was of that breed of Irish that is usually against too much law and order.

It was told of O'Brien that when he first landed in the States, fresh from the "ould sod"—and recently from a jail term for some land trouble—he was asked by the political steerer who got hold of him, which he was—a Republican, or a Democrat?

"Shure," said O'Brien, "I dunno; but I'm agin' the government!"

To O'Brien's mind, laws were made to be broken—at least, national laws. He was a very decent fellow otherwise; but if there was a scrimmage going on anywhere up and down the tropical coast of America, he was almost always sure to have a finger in the pie.

He gloried for years in the fact that the United States Secret Service kept a man watching his manoeuvres. He had "run" cargoes into dozens of troubled republics. He could sail anything that floated. He knew how to handle men, and the roughest of them buckled down to Ironsides O'Brien.

More than one petty rebellion, or revolution, of recent years in the banana states, as they are called, has been engineered in the private office of some well-known commercial house in New York City. The asphalt trust are not the only people who have turned a government topsy-turvy because it did not suit them!

Of late, however, O'Brien had not been in demand. Nick knew that he had been living quietly long enough to be eager to grasp at any opportunity for active service.

Had he tried to find O'Brien, or written to him over his own name, ten to one the filibuster would have taken to cover until he learned what it was the detective wanted of him. But Nick was sure that O'Brien did not know where he, Nick, lived, and he had merely written him to call at this time, and at this number, "on business."

The bait was too tempting for O'Brien to refuse. Madison Avenue suggested wealth, and, perhaps, some merchant desired his assistance in a matter of personal privilege among the little yellow men of the gulf coast.

O'Brien was a big fellow—over six feet, broad, muscular, and perfectly able to handle an ordinary man despite the fact that he was "shy a flipper." He dressed neatly in sailor blue, the empty sleeve of his right arm being pinned to his shoulder. He walked with a slightly rolling gait, was tanned to the color of mahogany, and chewed tobacco continually, although one never knew that saving from the shifting of his cud from one cheek to the other!

When Nick Carter entered the long room that he called his study, or office, O'Brien was certainly somewhat startled. He half rose from his chair, at first to see who his host might be; then, when he recognized Nick, his heavy black brows were drawn together and he stood upright, picking up his cap from the table.

"Ah, good evening to you, O'Brien!" said the detective suavely, walking around to his own chair.

"You're Mr. Nick Carter," said the filibuster directly. "I ain't got nothing to say to you. I'll tell you right now, however, that I am 'reading' this winter, as those here actors say. There's nothing doing.

If you guess there is, and that I'm in it, you're got another think coming."

"I haven't invited you here because I thought you were engaged in any of your old enterprises," returned Nick quietly.

For a moment a grim smile flickered over O'Brien's hard face. "You are not thinking of working up an expedition down south yourself, I suppose, Mr. Carter?"

"No. Nothing of the kind. Sit down again, O'Brien. I want to talk to you."

"You want me to talk to you, you mean," said the man directly.

"I want you to answer a few questions."

"I never answer questions," returned O'Brien. "A very smart United States district attorney tried that a few years ago—after the fiasco of Dupee's expedition in Anacaria. He found out I couldn't even make signs with my fingers," and O'Brien chuckled.

"But if you were asked some questions about an old dead-and-gone affair that could do no harm to anybody in the answering, wouldn't you speak?"

"That's according."

"According to what?"

"Let me be the judge of whether the answers would incriminate anybody or do any harm."

"Very well. I want to know about the expedition five years ago to Honduras, led, or commanded, by Pedro Salazar, in the interests of Manuel Alvarez, once president of Honduras."

O'Brien started and looked at Nick Carter for a moment from under his brows. Then he sank into his seat again.

"So old Alvarez was murdered, was he?" he said quietly.

Nick nodded.

"You are on the case?"

"Yes. I may as well be frank with you. He was foully murdered. It may be difficult to get the man who did it."

"But you know them?"

"I have some evidence and a great deal of suspicion," admitted Nick, with frankness.

"Well, if you are looking for Pedro Salazar in connection with the old man's taking off, you are looking up the wrong persimmon, Carter. Pedro worshipped the ground Alvarez put his foot on."

"So I understand. But Pedro has information of importance to Miss Dubois, the young woman who is the heiress of Alvarez."

"Oh, yes; the girl. I had forgotten her," said O'Brien thoughtfully.

"I am only anxious at present to find Pedro, and to learn something about that expedition he undertook with arms and ammunition for the insurgents against General D'Conyer's government in Honduras, some five years ago."

"She was wrecked," said O'Brien briefly.

"Do you know where?"

"Sure. About where she lays. What's the name

ter? You ain't goin' to try to float the old *Señora Valdez*, are you? She's a solid chunk of wood, but she ain't worth it."

"Ah!" said Nick, a light breaking in upon his mind. "So that was the name of Pedro's vessel?"

"The *Señora Valdez* was bought by Alvarez two years before he was forced into exile. He was too blamed stingy, they said, to have a private yacht; but he sometimes went sailing in that old hooker. Other times Pedro kept her in the coasting trade. The president gave her to Pedro."

"And Pedro lost her in this ill-fated expedition?"

"T'haw! he might have known Reiffe and that gang was onto him. But Pedro is a visionary cuss. That's what he is! He believed three parts of Honduras was wild to see old Alvarez back. Now, I tell you what's a fact: The whole gang of those yellow gents down there would be a whole lot more glad to see the big pot of money that Alvarez managed to hide away before he sloped."

"You believe in that hoarded fortune of the expedition, do you, O'Brien?"

"Sure. I know he had money by the shovelful. But he was fussy and got away with it."

"He certainly did not have much of it with him here in New York," said Nick.

"No. That's right, too."

"Then what became of all this treasure they talk about?" queried the detective, curious to get the filibuster's opinion on it.

"I'll tell you about that. It was the one mistake Alvarez made when he planned his getaway. You see he, too, was too confident of the loyalty of 'the common people.' Alvarez figured the Hondurians would stand just about a few months of D'Conyer, and that was all. He did not foresee that some of these blasted American millionaires would finance D'Conyer's game for certain concessions that they had tried to get from Alvarez. D'Conyer is wiser than old Alvarez ever thought of being."

"Then Alvarez really had the welfare of his people at heart?" queried Nick.

"He was one of these fools you call patriots!" exclaimed the filibuster, in disgust. "Huh! D'Conyer had him beat both ways from the ace, and right from the start. Alvarez believed the people would be clamoring for him to come back within a few months. Nobody has heard any clamor down there yet. The first yellor nut that raises a yip gets stood up against a wall and dies of lead poisoning."

"As I tell you, Mr. Carter, Alvarez made a mistake. He figured he would be back in the presidential palace, with his heels cocked up on his desk again in a mighty short time. So he never took that treasure out of Honduras!"

"That's my belief," concluded O'Brien, as Nick started and sat forward in his chair. "It's why he didn't use none of the treasure up here. He could not get at it. They say D'Conyer has dug up several public parks and almost undermined the palace try-

ing to find Alvarez's hiding place. And if the old man was murdered, and D'Conyer was really the instigator of the murder, make up your mind it was done because he hoped whoever Alvarez confided the secret of the treasure to, would instigate proceedings for the discovery of the loot.

"The minute any move is made to find Alvarez's treasure, agents of General D'Conyer will be right on hand to grapple to the doubloons and pieces of eight that they say the old boy put away. That old pirate hoard must amount to millions of money. I'd like to be in the scramble for the treasure myself," remarked the one-armed filibuster, with a sigh.

"For a share of it?" laughed Nick, yet looking at the man rather oddly.

"Rats! I suppose I could have been rich half a dozen times over," said O'Brien. "But what's the use? It's the fun I was thinking of."

"You mean there's likely to be a ruction, and you would be glad to be in it?"

"That's me, Mr. Carter. I never could resist a fight."

Nick settled back in his chair and looked him over, silently, for a full minute. He knew just what the old filibuster was. He was one of those adventurers whose spirit and method of mind has lived, and will live, through every age to the end of time.

In the ancient days, it was a man like Old Ironsides O'Brien who first ventured out of the safety of the community cave, with his club and rough-hewn spear, to attack the bear, or the buffalo.

When knights rode forth to seek adventure, Ironsides would have made a name as great as any ringing in the legends and ballads of the Golden Age.

Nick was sure of the intrepidity of the man. That he had always sold his courage and his ability to the highest bidder did not tell against him in Nick's mind. He understood the man.

"O'Brien," he said, "you chanced to ask, when we began talking, if I was planning any expedition myself, in which I might need your help. At that moment, I could not have answered you either Yes, or No. Now I can. Would you go into an attempt with me to find the dictator's treasure?"

"Thunder and Mars!" ejaculated the filibuster. "You don't mean that?"

"I am going to be frank with you. Has anybody approached you regarding this matter?"

"Not a soul!"

"You are not in communication with Colonel Reiffe, or anybody else who may be an agent for D'Conyer?"

"No, sir!"

"I believe your simple word, sir," said Nick. "Now I trust you with this information: Not only am I after Alvarez's treasures, but I am after his treasure. I have a clue to it. You may be right, that it is in Honduras. But so are Pedro Salazar to the man who holds the key—possibly without knowing it, however. First, I want to find Pedro. We

may even want to visit the scene of the shipwreck of the *Señora Valdez*. However, we shall make a try for the treasure, and there may be peril in the attempt."

"You bet there will be, Mr. Carter!" cried the one-armed man, rubbing his knee excitedly.

"The question is, terms being arranged agreeably, are you ripe for the job? And can you put me on the track of Pedro Salazar?"

"I say 'Yes' to both of those propositions, Mr. Carter!" cried O'Brien, offering his hand. "I shake on it. And no man can say that I don't keep faith with the men who buy my services!"

"I know your reputation, and am satisfied," declared Nick Carter quietly.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SEALED PACKET.

"Find! *Señora Valdez!* Ask! *Pedro Salazar!* Sealed packet! Gave him! Came aboard! Command! Nineteen-two!"

The explosive words—the last Manuel Alvarez had uttered—had been written down in Nick Carter's notebook. His conversation with Ironsides O'Brien, together with some other items of information he had picked up, practically explained these disjointed phrases.

The fact that the *Señora Valdez* was a ship, and not a lady, helped a good deal. Nick had feared that there was some woman who had been in the dictator's confidence at the time the treasure was hidden, and this would have complicated matters.

After his talk with O'Brien, Nick wrote the following under the disconnected words copied in his notebook:

"Find the *Señora Valdez* and ask Pedro Salazar for the sealed packet I gave him when he came aboard to command her in nineteen-two."

This, Nick believed, was the full text of Alvarez's thought. Why, the wrecked vessel that Pedro Salazar commanded was mentioned, Nick wondered. Had Alvarez forgotten, at that moment, the fact that the *Señora Valdez* was high and dry on the coast of Honduras?

However this might be, there was one very plain message in the words Alvarez had tried to utter. Pedro Salazar had been given a packet by the deposed President of Honduras, seven, or more, years before—probably on the deck of the ill-fated vessel he commanded.

It was in 1902 that Alvarez had been obliged to escape from his capital, and the vessel he sailed away upon was the *Señora Valdez*. The sealed packet he had confined to his faithful follower, the captain of the craft, was something he had never asked Pedro for afterward.

The mention of the sealed packet at the moment

when Alvarez was trying to tell Nick Carter how to win the lost treasure for Cecile Dubois, pointed to one thing: The mysterious packet contained information which would lead to the finding of the treasure.

Nick said nothing about all this to O'Brien, the old filibuster. Only in Chickering Carter did he confide these details.

With O'Brien, however, the detective made arrangements to find Pedro Salazar. Pedro, it seemed, was running on the same vessel that the suspect, Mondrego, sailed upon—the *Greiber Castle*.

Pedro held some petty office on the steamship, which, although manned for the most part by Hondurians, was owned by a Scotch firm. The telegraph that very night assured Nick that the *Greiber Castle* sailed some time the following day for Santa Luca, the capital and principal seaport of Honduras.

Nick secured a double stateroom for himself and O'Brien, wiring for the passage before he went to bed. O'Brien was used to traveling in light marching order, and on short notice.

With the map that Alvarez had drawn of the situation of the wrecked *Señora Valdez*, and O'Brien to get a boat and gather a crew among men whom he knew at Santa Luca, Nick believed it would be easy to secretly reach the wreck.

It might be that the treasure was hidden near the place where the *Señora Valdez* had gone ashore. At least, the sealed packet, supposedly in the possession of Pedro Salazar, must explain that mystery.

Nick left Chickering to look out for Cecile Dubois, and watch affairs in New York. Nick was not ready to make any arrests as yet, for, although he had moral proof that Reiffe and Mondrego had compassed Señor Alvarez's death, he needed stronger evidence. Besides, the matter might be taken up by the government before it was finished. Already there had been an inquiry made from Washington of the New York police regarding the death of the ex-President of Honduras. Even Nick's friends at headquarters did not know that he was engaged in solving the murder mystery.

The detective and O'Brien left for Baltimore on an early train and were at the dock barely in season to catch the *Greiber Castle*. They went aboard like ordinary passengers, and it was well they did. Before dinner that evening Nick had learned that there were aboard both Colonel Jules Reiffe, the accredited spy of General D'Conyer, present dictator of the Hondurian Republic, and Mondrego, the man whom Nick had every reason to believe had placed the poisonous asp where the creature would be sure to sting to death Señor Manuel Alvarez.

Nick was traveling as "Mr. Bambard," and he could only hope that neither Reiffe, nor Mondrego would know him. He knew Reiffe by the photograph Miss Dubois had given him of the spy, and Mondrego was recognizable from the description Chick had obtained of him.

Besides, O'Brien knew them both, of course. O'Brien knew about everybody aboard the steamship, down to the stokers in the hold.

On the second day out the old filibuster advised Nick to remain in their stateroom during the forenoon watch, and at that time he brought Pedro Salazar to the detective, and introduced him.

"Mr. Carter is just as square a man as I am, Pedro," said O'Brien—and that was a compliment to Nick. "Señor Alvarez had confidence in him, and he is working in the interests of Miss Duhois. I understand. You can be open with him."

O'Brien then took up his station outside the stateroom to see that there was no eavesdropping on the part of other possibly interested parties.

Nevertheless, a man cannot well be in two distinct places at once! O'Brien could not be in the passage outside the door, and likewise on the deck near the open port of the stateroom. This oversight, however, Nick was not made aware of until afterward.

Pedro Salazar was a heavily built man of Portuguese extraction, with short, crisp curly black hair, a skin like golden-brown satin, a finely shaped head, which should have held a splendid mind, but which really harbored about as much innocence and guilelessness as a grown man could really pack around.

It was plain to Nick Carter, before he had talked five minutes with Pedro, that the man possessed just one human attribute that was of value. He was faithful!

A secret might safely be intrusted to Salazar. Life itself would be given up first by the sailor and ex-commander of the *Señora Valdez*!

The man wept when he heard the details of Alvarez's death from the detective. He did not suspect his fellow officer aboard the *Greiber Castle*, Mondrego, and Nick said nothing about that individual, for it was not his intention to stir up a feud between them.

"It was a plot, señor, worthy of that unburned child of the nether world, D'Conyer! And I mistake not if Colonel Reiffe did not know something about it. He is a devil too. But the daughter—the pretty Cecile? What of her?"

"It is because of her, Pedro, that I am here," Nick Carter explained. "It was to her that Alvarez left all—by will."

"All?" cried the man. "Do you mean that he revealed to her where the great treasure is buried?"

"No. But he gave me a clue to it. She is to have all—for a purpose."

"Ay. He believed that a time would come—even if he were dead—when a savior for Honduras would arise. The treasure is for him. I understand," said Pedro simply. "It was too precious to be used at the time of my wild attempt five years ago, when I lost my *Señora Valdez*."

"By the way, Pedro," said the detective coolly, "erst your mind back to the day in nineteen hundred and two when you came aboard your ship to take com-

mand—I believe it was when the president made his escape from Honduras."

"It was by night. I remember well. I had been away into the mountains to sound the people there, and barely escaped with my life. The fools! They were all disaffected and befooled by D'Conyer."

"You remember the occasion, then?"

"Quite, señor."

"Where was your vessel lying, then?"

"In the bay of Santa Luca, opposite the president's house. She had laid there with nobody aboard but the ship-keeper, for a month. She had been in readiness all that time for just what happened."

"An overturn of the government?"

"Ay, señor, that is it."

"And your crew?"

"Scattered among the drinking shops of Santa Luca. But every man faithful, and doing his little best among the riffraff of the docks to stay the tide in favor of the usurper. But D'Conyer's agents had promised them the spoils of the palace to divide. The fact of the great treasure had been noised abroad. It was the president's honest money, honestly gained years before. The pirate board was stumbled upon by an old sailor, who gave the president a map of the place where it was buried. I know, for I helped bring the chests to Santa Luca, when I was a young man."

"Was there really much of this treasure, Pedro?" asked Nick curiously.

"Millions of dollars, señor! Believe me, such a treasure was never owned by one man before. And I never saw but a part of it."

"Well," said Nick, "to return to this day—or night—when you were recalled aboard the *Señora Valdez*. The president was there to meet you?"

"Ay, señor. His servants had brought his baggage aboard, thinking he was going on a trip such as he sometimes took with me."

"Yes?"

"But it was flight!" exclaimed Pedro. "There were too many knives sharpened for him in Santa Luca and about the palace. So we gathered the crew and set sail before morning."

"Yes, but when you came aboard and met the president, there was something of importance said to you by Señor Alvarez—was there not?"

Pedro looked at Nick in a puzzled way, and his brows drew together.

"In fact," pursued the detective, "he gave you something to take care of—something for which he never asked you since?"

Pedro started upright, and stepped back toward the stateroom door.

"What do you mean, señor?" he cried.

"When Alvarez was dying he said to me: 'Ask Pedro Salazar for the sealed packet. I gave him when he came aboard to command her in nineteen-two.' You must know what was meant, Salazar," said Nick Carter quietly.

The man continued to stare at the detective, but said no word.

"The packet is important to my search, I feel confident," explained Nick. "Otherwise, Alvarez would not have said what he did about it. You have the packet, Pedro?"

The man nodded vigorously.

"Then you will comply with the president's expressed wish?"

"Señor! Do you know what the now dead-and-gone president—may his murderers burn forever!—said to me when he placed the charge in my hands?"

"No."

"He said to me, Pedro Salazar: 'Forget that you have this, Pedro, my friend. It is precious, but it will never be mentioned between us until that time when the dawn of peace for Honduras may break. It may be that I shall be dead; nevertheless, he who asks you for the packet will come from me. Doubt not.'

"I do not doubt," declared Pedro Salazar brokenly. "But it is like a command from my dead master. The packet is here," and he slapped his breast. "It has never left me, day or night. I have sat with him and talked of the future of Honduras, while the packet has burned upon my breast. Never did we speak of it together."

"It is of much importance, I have no doubt. I was instructed to examine it and be guided by the directions contained therein," declared Nick.

"It is thine," said Pedro, and at once burrowed in his clothing and brought forth a flat parcel, made of two pieces of heavy wash leather, stitched together.

"I had the cover made, señor," remarked Pedro. "Otherwise it would have worn. I declare to you, as Heaven is my judge, I have never tampered with the president's sealed packet."

He left the flat package in Nick's hand, bowed, and went out of the stateroom.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RACE.

Nick Carter sat down at once and ripped the two pieces of leather open with the small blade of his pocketknife. Inside this unique covering was another of oiled silk, sealed in half a dozen places, the wax stamped with the official seal of the Hondurian Republic.

Nick slid the blade of his knife under these seals, and soon was unwrapping the silk. There were several thicknesses of the stuff; but, finally, there came to light an ordinary "official" envelope, and Nick broke the seal of this at once.

Within there appeared to be but a single slip of heavy paper, and a flat steel key. On the paper was written, in Spanish:

"This is the key to the storeroom under the bowsprit of the *Señora Valdez*."

That was all. At first the laconic inscription rather staggered Nick Carter.

Then the shrewd detective began to put two and two together and build up a very probable explanation, indeed, of the mystery.

Alvarez, in dying, had mentioned the *Señora Valdez* very particularly. He knew that the old ship, although high and dry on the coast of eastern Honduras, was still holding together. Something further regarding the treasure he had hidden in the forward storeroom of the ship.

Having seen what manner of man Pedro Salazar was, Nick jumped to a conclusion that he proceeded to put to the test.

First, he burned the paper holding the inscription, and put the flat key with his own private keys in his pocket. Then he sent O'Brien to ask Pedro to return to the stateroom for a minute.

When the Portuguese came, Nick asked him at once:

"What kind of a lock is on the door of the storeroom under the bowsprit of the *Señora Valdez*?"

The sailor started and looked puzzled.

"I do not know. There once was no lock at all. But the president had a lock put on it."

"When?"

"Just after he bought the ship."

"Did you use the storeroom?"

"Oh, yes. Off and on."

"What is in it now?" asked Nick.

"I don't know, señor. I have not seen the inside of the room for years."

"Since when?"

"Well—since the president escaped from Santa Luca."

"In other words, since the night in nineteen hundred and two that you came back from the hills and made swift preparations to sail?"

"That is right, señor."

"Why haven't you used it?"

"Well, señor, the president had locked the room, and he told me he had some of his property in it—possibly his clothing—I don't know. I did not have use for the place. It is not a large room, and unless one searched for it, the door would not easily be found. There was a whole lot of litter up there in the bows of the *Señora Valdez*, and it merely looked as though the base of the bowsprit was boxed in with heavy planking."

"So you are sure the storeroom has never been opened?"

"Not while I was in command."

"That means until she was wrecked?"

"And since then I have been aboard," admitted Pedro.

"You have!"

"A year later. The jungle is growing in on the old ship. Reiffe and his men cleaned out her cargo, but they touched nothing else. Now, I suppose, trees may be growing on her deck."

"And you feel certain that the storeroom under the sprit has not been opened?"

"Quite, señor."

Nick looked at him a moment thoughtfully, and then said:

"Pedro, I am first going to see the wreck of the *Señora Valdez*. I want to see what is in that storeroom. Will you join O'Brien and I in the attempt to get there?"

"Surely, señor. I have already asked my captain for leave of absence. I have agreed with Señor O'Brien to be one of the crew of the vessel he says you wish to engage at Santa Luca."

"Very well," said Nick. "Now, nothing more until we look into the storeroom of the old *Señora Valdez*."

It was the purpose of the detective and O'Brien to keep away from Pedro for the remainder of the voyage. Reiffe and Mondrego showed no interest in "Mr. Bamhard," as Nick was registered on the purser's book, but they might suspect O'Brien of coming south for something beside his health!

When the *Greiber Castle* entered the almost landlocked Santa Luca Bay, the first of a series of delays for the detective began. At first they seemed innocent enough delays.

Some people in the second cabin were ill. The symptoms might easily be taken for cholera; but after being quarantined for two days—and, of course, the entire ship and ship's company with them—it was discovered that they had merely been made ill by eating some over-ripe Dutch cheese!

Meanwhile the detective had the pleasure of kicking his heels in illness and looking at the sprawling city of Santa Luca at the head of the bay, with its vivid whites and greens, and rising in terraces from the shore of the bay to the president's palace at the summit of the hill behind the town.

It was hot down there in the bay, too!

O'Brien was as nervous as a caged lion. He tramped the deck and muttered. When it was found

that a cholera scare had been circulated among the lighter people, and that it spelled delay before the passengers could get ashore, he observed to Nick:

"Somebody's put the kibosh on us, Carter—as sure as you're a foot high! We're being held up for a purpose."

"Nonsense! Everybody else is being held up, too."

"You're a smart man, but you haven't the knowledge of these people that I have! Do you notice that there's a boat going back and forth to the shore twice a day, and Reiffe always has a personal talk with the man that commands it?"

"The quarantine officer's boat," said Nick doubtfully.

"Well, what if it is? Reiffe's master is the biggest toad in the puddle here. Don't forget that."

Nick laughed. But after they had managed to get ashore and O'Brien found it so very, very hard to obtain a sailing vessel to take them to the east coast, the detective began to take stock in what the old filibuster said.

Reiffe and Mondrego had disappeared almost at once on landing. A week later O'Brien came sweating to the detective, and declared he had learned on good authority that the two henchmen of President D'Conyer had sailed the very night they landed from the steamship, in a sponging schooner, bound east.

"There's been a leak somewhere," declared the one-armed filibuster. "I tell you that gang is trying to get ahead of us. If getting the treasure necessitates your reaching the wreck of the *Señora Valdez*—though I don't see how that's possible, Carter—Reiffe and his gang of cutthroats will get there first."

At this, Nick began to act on his own hook. Heretofore he had let O'Brien run the campaign in Santa Luca, as he knew his way about better.

He went to the representative of the Washington government and put the case before him. In two hours he had papers calling for the arrest and the bringing before the Hondurian tribunal to decide the matter of extradition of both Colonel Reiffe and the sailor, Mondrego, charged with murder committed in New York.

The consul had a steam launch of commodious size, and Nick borrowed it. With the small crew O'Brien had gathered, including Pedro Salazar as pilot, the party started for the wreck of the *Señora Valdez*.

Not that Nick expected to get justice upon Reiffe and Mondrego in the courts influenced by D'Conyer.

The president would not learn of the warrants until after the steam launch was on her way. But the papers would serve to give Nick power over the Hondurians for the time being.

Nick took pains, however, to cable in cipher to the head of a commercial house at La Guayra, which was in another state, and absolutely independent of Hondurian influence. This cable, the detective expected, would play an important part in the finale of this rather uncertain case.

For it was very uncertain, indeed, when the launch left Santa Luca, as to which party would, in the end, obtain the great treasure hidden so well by Manuel Alvarez.

Nick was quite ready to believe that Reiffe had, in some way, learned quite as much about the treasure as he knew himself. He remembered now that during the conversation he had held with Pedro in the stateroom, the window had been open for air.

O'Brien could only watch the door; he could not be in two places at once. Nick feared that either Reiffe or Mondrego had overheard enough of the talk to draw their own conclusions—as Nick himself had—regarding the hiding place of the ex-president's treasure.

CHAPTER XIII.

MILLIONS OF MONEY.

Colonel Reiffe and Mondrego, with their companions, had made sail from Santa Luca in a schooner of some sixty tons. The distance to the spot where the *Señora Valdez* had been driven ashore, five years previously, was some three hundred miles. Even with the baffling winds of this coast, the party should have been almost to their destination by the time Nick Carter's steam launch passed out of the entrance to the great bay of Santa Luca.

But the consul's craft was a swift one, and in the evening of the second day she nosed her way in among the shoals, guided by Pedro's skillful hand, to an anchorage not two miles from the wreck.

It was too dark to do anything further that night, and the crew lay armed about the deck until dawn for fear of a surprise from Reiffe and his party.

When daylight came, however, they saw almost at once a most astonishing sight. There, not two cable lengths away, was the little schooner, her masts gone, rails smashed in, and her hull rocking on a reef, which she had evidently tried to jump!

With a pilot who had not known the waters well, the schooner had come to grief. Not a sign of Reiffe's party was to be seen.

Pedro manoeuvred the consul's yacht so as to bring her even nearer the mainland. Finally the party beheld the stern of the old *Señora Valdez*, looking like a black cliff in the mouth of the dry estuary, where she had been driven years before by the hurricane.

Her rails were fringed with hanging plants, and even small trees. Her foremast, with the crow's-nest, was still standing. Frayed ropes and tattered canvas hung from this, intermixed with the verdure that had climbed to the very summit of the mast.

From a cliff overhead a great mass of earth had fallen on the deck of the wreck, and several palms, with ripe coconuts clustered at their summits, hung over the old vessel, that was wedged upright on her keel between the rocks.

It was the strangest sight one ever saw—this massive ship surrounded and overgrown by the jungle, and so far from the sea which was its natural element.

Nick's party saw no sign of the men who had arrived before them; but it was not believed that Reiffe and his companions had been lost when their schooner was wrecked. Leaving a small party aboard, Nick, O'Brien, and Pedro took the other members of their crew ashore and approached the stranded *Señora Valdez*.

Luckily O'Brien was cautious. They approached the wreck with care, and when within gunshot, without further ado, several weapons were discharged at them from the rail of the *Señora Valdez*.

"What shall be done, Mr. Carter?" demanded O'Brien. "Shall we sit down and starve them out, or what——"

"They have opened the ball," returned Nick. "These fellows are not to be treated with mildness. Two of them are murderers. I have warrants for their apprehension. Tell them so, O'Brien; and if they do not at once surrender, we will open fire on them and drive them out of that wreck like rats!

"You're a man after my own heart, Carter!" declared the old filibuster with joy.

He recited Nick's ultimatum to the men behind the breastworks of the wreck's rail, and then called on Reiffe and Mondrego to surrender. To the surprise of the attacking party a loud laugh was the answer to O'Brien's demand, and the two men in question appeared at the rail.

"Let us see the warrants, señor?" requested Colonel Reiffe. "You need not be so ferocious, by the way. We are alone here. Our crew deserted us at the time of the wreck."

Nick stepped forward, displayed the official seals on the papers he held, and read the warrants aloud.

"They sound valid," admitted the spy. "And they may be so. Let me see; your name is Bambard? Well, señor Bambard, I am inclined to give up to you and go back to Santa Luca for the settlement of this case. I see I am accused of murder—a very serious charge. Mondrego, my friend, I suppose you will surrender, too?"

Mondrego growled what appeared to be an assent. The two Hondurians coolly climbed down from the wreck. They were so mild, indeed, that both O'Brien and Nick were thrown off their guard for the moment.

But the instant the couple touched the ground, although Reiffe stood smilingly ready to meet Nick, his companion darted into the bushes, evidently having no mind to stand in court for the murder of Alvarez, even in Santa Luca.

With a yell, Pedro Salazar was after him. Up to this point, and until the reading aloud of the warrants, Pedro had not understood that there really was evidence against Reiffe and Mondrego. Now the latter's running seemed to be a tacit admission on his part that he was guilty of the murder of the ex-President of Honduras!

Ere Nick had snapped the handcuffs on Reiffe, there came a shrill shriek from the jungle, and in a minute Pedro came forth, coolly wiping his knife on a banana leaf.

"He will not run farther," he said. "If he killed the president, may his soul burn in torment forever and a day! You will not let that one escape, Señor Carter?" and he scowled at Reiffe.

"I'll see to that," said O'Brien, and called to one of the men who had brought ashore a bundle. Out of this he produced a set of convict's irons, and these were locked on Reiffe on the spot, and he was left chained to a log while the party proceeded to board the old wreck.

It was surprising in what good repair the *Señora Valdez* really was. The old vessel might have still floated for many a year had she not been high and dry on the rocks. And saving her stern, she was not visible at all from the water or from the shore, so entirely covered was she with the rank tropical vegetation.

Monkeys swung and chattered in the branches of the palms that had taken root upon her deck. Brilliant parquets flew back and forth and screamed their challenges at the invaders. Lizards ran along the rails or leaped from the ends of the splintered spars. The whole hulk of the old vessel was invaded by the animal and vegetable life of the jungle.

Nick and Pedro went below, leaving the others to examine the deck of the *Señora Valdez*. Pedro said at once that somebody had been in the hold of the ship since he last visited it.

"I nailed up the hatch, señor. The nails have been drawn. But it would seem as though whoever was here before us had tried their best to hide their own trail. I am suspicious," said Pedro.

"So am I," muttered Nick. "I begin to think that this Reiffe has a longer head than I gave him credit for. There is something suspicious in his calmness despite the fact that he can be pretty sure that he would be freed at once by the courts in Santa Luca."

They forced their way forward over the dunnage in the hold, to the extreme bows of the wreck. Not a timber seemed to have been started by the awful shock she must have suffered when she was carried ashore by the tidal wave.

Assisted by Pedro, the detective was enabled to find the door of the closet, under the bowsprit, with ease. The lock had been forced!

"Make up your mind, Pedro," said Nick quietly, "either this place contained nothing of importance, or others have been ahead of us and we shall find nothing."

But as it turned out, Nick Carter, at this time, was wrong in both premises. When the door was opened and they flashed the light of their lantern into the room a cry of amazement escaped them both.

The first object the light fell upon was a small chest with the lid wrenched open. And it was more than half full of loose gold coin!

Somebody had dipped into the contents of this open chest without a doubt. The coins were Spanish and American, all dating within the last century. They were a part of Manuel Alvarez's private fortune without a doubt, and had nothing to do with the great hoard of pirate treasure that he was said to possess.

Nor did Nick find any trace of the old doubloons and pieces of eight that he had had reason to believe would be found with the rest of the dictator's treasure. There were three other chests, all with bags of gold and silver coin in them—mostly silver.

It was really a great fortune. As money is counted in the South American states there were "millions of dollars" in the hoard. There was every evidence, however, that a part, if not the bulk, of the treasure had been removed before Nick and his party had reached the wreck of the *Señora Valdez*.

Reiffe was not to be made to speak. He laughed long and heartily when Nick and O'Brien came back to him. Some words he let drop, however, suggested to the American detective that Reiffe and Mondrego had been robbed of the piratical treasure, which they had first got out of the secret closet in the wreck, by the crew that they had brought with them.

To get out the remaining chests and lower them to the ground from the rail of the *Señora Valdez* was no small job. But when Pedro was sent along the coast to signal the men aboard the steam launch to come ashore with the small boat again, the party was treated to another, and a very unhappy, surprise.

The steam launch was standing out to sea. O'Brien was sure his men had not played them false, and the body of one of them, with a knife in his heart, washing about in the surf seemed to prove that they had been attacked and the launch captured by the crew of the wrecked schooner.

"There goes the bulk of the dictator's treasure; I have no doubt," declared Nick, when the excitement of the discovery was over. "We may as well make up our mind to its loss. Those fellows will get away with the consul's hoard—and I'll have to pay for it—and we'll never hear of them again. No use blaspheming, O'Brien. It is the fortunes of war."

Reiffe continued to laugh. For a man who faced prosecution for murder in the American courts, and who was in irons, he was particularly light-hearted over the whole affair!

The party were practically marooned here on this isolated coast. It would be a dangerous, if not an impossible, march to try and reach a civilized community by following the coast. They might just as well have been upon a desert island, and even the sight of the gold and silver coin did not cheer up the party to any extent.

They managed to live on what they could forage in the jungle for four days. By that time they were in rags, blistered by the sun, and altogether in a very unhappy state of mind. Reiffe—who evidently expected rescue from some source, possibly by a gunboat sent up the coast by General O'Conner—was the only man who could force a grin to his face.

On the fifth day, however, that grin fled forever from the doughy colonel's countenance!

The smoke of a steamer was sighted. Through an old glass that Pedro had raked out of the cabin of the wreck, Nick made the coming vessel out to be flying the private pennant of the man with whom he had communicated by cable at La Guayra.

He then broke the news to his friends that, even before they started from Santa Luca, he had arranged for their leaving this spot in a vessel other than that which had brought them here.

Reiffe lost all hope, then. He saw how shrewd his captor had been, and while the others wildly rejoiced in the appearance of the rescuing party, the Hondurian spy had not a word to say.

He saw that Nick's warrants, returnable to the courts at Santa Luca, had been but a ruse. From La Guayra he would be railroaded to the New York courts, and once under their jurisdiction, with such evidence as Nick Carter and his assistants had already obtained, he could scarcely clear himself of complicity in the murder of Señor Manuel Alvarez.

When the boat was sent ashore for the castaway party, Pedro Salazar disappeared. To Nick, O'Brien confided the fact that the Hondurian considered it unsafe to risk an inquiry in the American or Hondurian courts over the death of Mondrego. He had declared his intention of slipping away to the filibuster, and Nick knew how useless it would be to try and find the sailor in the jungle.

The detective had brought ashore, however, and placed upon the old wreck an ample supply of provisions, a gun, pistol, and a few tools. He did not know in what need Pedro Salazar might be before he found means of leaving the coast.

Out of the treasure recovered, Nick amply rewarded the five members of O'Brien's crew who had helped them. O'Brien was to wait for his wage until they returned to New York.

And when the steamer headed for La Guayra, it looked as though there would be nothing to detain them, and that, with the dictator's fortune for Miss Dubois, and Colonel Reiffe, who had undoubtedly planned the murder of Señor Alvarez, the detective and the filibuster would, in a few days, be headed for the metropolis of the United States.

THE END.

The next number (675) will contain "Pieces of Eight; or, Nick Carter Solves a Strange Riddle."



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A YANKEE PILOT.

In the memorable year of 1776, after General Howe had been driven out of Boston by Washington, he embarked with his army on board the British fleet in the harbor, which, after a few days, sailed, leaving behind them three or four men-of-war as a sort of blockade of the port. It was some months before the Americans succeeded in driving these ships from their anchorage.

While the English cruisers were anchored in the neighborhood of Nantasket and Point Alderton, occasional expeditions of a character which may be designated as trifling when the main result of the hostilities is considered, were undertaken by those on board. It is in relation to one of these matters that our sketch will be confined, premising, however, that the circumstances were of actual occurrence.

The town of Eastham is situated upon the peninsula of Cape Cod, about seventy miles from Boston, in a southeast direction, and was a place of considerable maritime importance a hundred years ago, when the struggle for American independence first commenced, a specialty in which it still maintains its character.

As we have intimated, the British were very fond of fitting out small expeditions for the annoyance of the towns upon the Cape, and occasionally these rose to no little importance, as was the case when they destroyed the town of Falmouth.

At Eastham was a well-known individual named Captain Noyes, whose business was to act as a pilot anywhere in Massachusetts Bay, but who devoted a portion of his time to fishing as a means of supporting his young family. On these occasions he would make a long reach out to sea with his little half-decked boat, taking his eldest son with him, and of fifteen.

Captain Noyes was a true-hearted patriot and a brave man. He had already commanded several small crafts in expeditions against the enemy, and had brought in one very valuable prize—no less than a British shore ship, with arms and ammunition designed for General Howe's army besieged in Boston.

On his fishing excursions Captain Noyes found him-

self off Provincetown Point—or, to make it perhaps still clearer to the general reader, off the extreme headland of Cape Cod. He was slowly drifting with the tide, and fishing, when it suddenly came on to blow, and he was compelled to make everything snug on board his little craft, reef down his one sail, and seek a lee under the land at Race Point. As he ran into Cape Cod Bay he was overtaken by a small schooner of about a hundred tons, apparently a coast fisherman.

The schooner had no sooner doubled the headland of Race Point than it ran so close to Captain Noyes' boat as to hail him. There seemed to be but three men on board, one of whom asked Noyes if he could pilot them hereabouts, and said they were strangers from Portsmouth, N. H. Noyes ranged up alongside and told the man who hailed him that he was a pilot, and could do so.

"Heave us your painter and come on board then," said the man in the schooner.

"Ay, ay," replied Noyes, and soon after he was on board the schooner with his boy.

No sooner had he got fairly over the bulwarks, however, than he discovered that he had been cheated, for there came up from the cabin at the same moment an officer wearing a lieutenant's uniform of the British service, and nearly a dozen seamen, who had remained out of sight until now, appeared upon the deck of the schooner.

Noyes was too well posted not to understand the meaning of all this at a glance.

He had been trapped.

The seeming fishing schooner had been captured somewhere along shore and fitted up to do all the mischief she could among the small craft that ventured about in Massachusetts Bay.

As afterward appeared, she had taken two fishing vessels, one off Gloucester and one off Marblehead, both of which she had burned after taking out of them whatever it was thought worth while to save.

She had on board a lieutenant in command, a boatswain, and twelve seamen.

Her armament was a couple of six-pound swivels and the proper material to serve them.

Noyes' practiced eye took in these matters at once, but in the meantime it was coming on to blow "big guns," and the schooner was one of those little craft known to the New England coast fifty and a hundred years ago, sharp at the stern as at the bows, called pink sterns. These little vessels were very weathery when properly handled, but the young British officer had never sailed in one before the present time.

No doubt he could have handled a sloop-of-war easier than he could manage that little New England shore craft.

In the course of half an hour the stiff breeze had ripened into a regular gale, and the lieutenant, calling Noyes into the cabin, took out a chart of Cape Cod Bay, and asked him where they could make a harbor.

"Either shore," said the pilot. "We are in the middle of the bay."

"The wind is hereaway, north and east," said the lieutenant.

"Exactly."

"Well, what do you advise, pilot? It's getting pretty rough for this frail craft."

"We might run into Plymouth, or on the opposite side of the bay to Wellfleet."

"No, no, that won't do. I want to go into some quiet place to ride out the gale."

"Let me see," said Noyes.

"Isn't there some creek along shore away from the towns?" asked the officer.

"We might make Brant Point," said Noyes. "That's lonely enough."

"We'll try it, then—there's no time to lose."

The pilot took the helm and gave his orders as to trim-

ming the sail. Noyes knew very well that the schooner couldn't ride out a northeaster at Brant Point, but on they bowled, dragging his own boat astern.

The schooner was not long after brought to anchor at the Point, but the storm increased as the night came on, until the schooner lurched and pitched in such a fashion that it was very plain she could not hold together long in that position.

"This will never do, pilot," said the lieutenant. "We shall be thrown ashore and go to pieces if we don't get away from here."

"I've been thinking so," said Noyes.

"Shall we heave up anchor?"

"Yes, if you can," said the pilot.

The order was given, and in a little while the schooner, under a double-reefed mainsail and jib, was got with her head off the land and worked out into the bay.

"Where now?" asked the lieutenant.

"I'll run under the lee of Billingsgate Point, and see if we can't ride easier there."

"Very good."

It was with considerable difficulty that the little craft was worked to an anchorage under Billingsgate Point in the teeth of the gale, but at last the anchor was let go, and the crew and the lieutenant were completely wet through, as well as being thoroughly exhausted by their extraordinary exertions.

Here the schooner rode more quietly, and all hands turned in, leaving the pilot and his son to keep the watch on deck, with a couple of foremast hands. It was not long before every soul was fast asleep except Noyes, who began to explore the schooner very quietly, even going boldly into the cabin, where he found a small-arms chest, and secured half a dozen brass pocket pistols and some balls and powder.

In the hold—he carried a ship's lantern with him—he discovered, in a small locker, a barrel of New England rum. Finding also a gallon measure, he drew it full and brought it up to the crowded forecabin, where the men were sleeping. He shook one of the seamen, and said:

"Boys, I've had my drink, and I think I needed it after such a tough time. Have some?"

Who ever knew a sailor to refuse rum at sea? One after another woke up, and that gallon measure was three times renewed by Noyes, and as quickly emptied by the thirsty sailors. He also took care to supply the two men on deck as liberally as those off watch, priming them up until they could neither see nor stand.

He now loaded his pistols, woke up his son, and, explaining his plan to him, gave him two of the weapons and told him not to use them unless he gave the order. The wind had hauled to the westward a point or two. With the help of his son Noyes managed to hoist just enough of the mainsail to catch a cap full of the strong wind, and a couple of rings of the jib. This done, he cut loose the anchor hawser, and the schooner began to drift instantly to the eastward across the bay.

Noyes was at the helm.

He knew what he was about. He told his son to hammer the end of the hawser where it had been cut so as to make it appear as though it had been severed by a strain and not by the knife. This was done as a precaution.

There was hardly sail enough on the schooner to give her steerage way, but Noyes did guide her with the helm until she drifted over Eastham bar just as daylight fairly broke. He knew every inch of the harbor, and steered through the channel until he got the schooner just opposite the town, where he ran her aground hard and fast.

Of course this created quite a shock.

Up tumbled the lieutenant, but the moment he appeared above the hatchway he was seized from behind by Noyes, who, with his son, tied his arms securely behind him, at the same time threatening to blow his brains out if he offered any resistance. This threat, being backed by the sight

of a pistol aimed at his face, was altogether too convincing an argument not to be heeded.

"Where are we?" asked the lieutenant.

"In Eastham harbor."

"How did we get across the bay?"

"By wind and sail," said Noyes.

He then led the British officer below, and locked him up in the little cabin.

One by one he handcuffed the drunken sailors with irons found in the arms chest, and the boatswain, who woke up during the operation, was also tied to a stanchion so as to make him perfectly secure.

In the meantime the day had fully broken and the villagers, discovering the strange schooner, were flocking to the shore.

Noyes signalled them, and a boat load soon came off to his assistance.

"Pilot," asked the lieutenant, "how did you get all my men drunk?"

"With that cask of rum."

"What cask?"

"Didn't you know of it?"

"No."

"Well, there was one in the hold, and looking around I happened to find it. That's all."

The prisoners were landed in safety, and properly confined at Eastham until orders were received from General Ward, then in command at Boston, as to their disposition.

The schooner was easily floated from her bed at high tide. She was found uninjured, and became the sole property of Captain Noyes, who had so very successfully captured her and her crew.

So bloodless and satisfactory a capture had not occurred along the coast in many a long day, where a pilot and his son brought in a vessel and thirteen prisoners of war without bloodshed.

The story of the Yankee pilot, Captain Noyes, of Cape Cod, was often told on shipboard during the struggle between the American colonies and the mother country, which finally ended in our independence.

A FEARFUL LEAP.

The bark *Tempest*, of New London, sailed from Talcahuana on the morning of the twenty-first of April, 18—, with two passengers and a crew of thirty men, including the officers. The passengers were a lady of twenty-eight and her daughter Ida, a lively little girl of ten. The latter soon won the love of all hands. She was a perfect little "rump," and flitted hither and thither about the ship, laughing and chatting with officers and men, as if she had known them for years. A profusion of bright golden hair curled about her white forehead and rolled in rippling waves over her rounded cheeks, rosy with health, and her fair neck. Her eyes seemed tinted with the blended hues of sky and ocean, and her long lashes were as bright as the tassels of the waving corn. Her voice was like the chirping of a bird, her laugh like the tinkling of a harp; her footfall like the pattering of dewdrops on leaves.

She seemed a stranger to fear. She would clap her tiny hands and shout merrily in the midst of the howling tempest, and sometimes the old tars would shudder with dread on seeing her looking down upon them from the mizzentop or the topmast rigging.

"She will surely fall," they would whisper among themselves. "Stand by to lower a boat."

But even as they spoke, the child, with a merry laugh, would grasp a swaying rope and swing herself to the deck, to be patted upon the head by the grim sea dogs and cautioned "not to go aloft again."

One day while Tom Breech—a Spanish youth of nineteen, and one of Ida's most enthusiastic admirers—was at work in the waist, a loosened block fell from aloft and struck him upon the head.

He fell senseless to the deck, but was soon picked up and carried into the fore-castle. A camphor bottle was applied to his nostrils, and he opened his eyes. Then, starting to his elbow, he gazed around him in a bewildered manner.

"Gone, gone!" he shrieked. "Where is she? Ho, ho, ho! here is my fairy Ida? They want her, away down there under the sea—the fishes and the mermaids—and they have me up to bring her to them."

He would have sprung from his bunk, if strong arms had not held him. His brain had been injured; he was delirious, and his shrieks now rang throughout the ship. He pronounced the name of Ida almost continually, and the little girl heard him as she stood upon the quarter-deck by her mother's side.

"He is mad," said the mate, coming aft. "The blow upon his head has destroyed his reason."

"He is calling me," exclaimed Ida, her big blue eyes beaming with sympathy. "Let me go to him, mamma—oh, do let me go to him! It may do him good, and make him get well."

"No, no!" exclaimed the mate. "I'm afraid the sight of you would only make him worse. Besides, he might attempt to hurt you, for he is mad, my little girl, and—"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that!" cried Ida; "not in the least! Take me into the fore-castle, that's a dear, good man."

"I dare not allow you to go now," said her mother; "but you shall see the poor sailor after he has gone to sleep. Then he cannot hurt you."

Ida pouted with disappointment, and tears rushed to her eyes. She put her tiny hands over her ears to shut out the cries of the delirious Spaniard, which made her heart bound with anguish, since she was not allowed to see him.

"I am really afraid," whispered the mate to Mrs. Howland—"I'm really afraid, ma'am, that Tom would hurt the little girl, if he got hold of her; for he raves about mermaids and fishes, and says that he was sent up here to carry her to the bottom of the sea. It's my opinion that if he saw her he would wish to take hold of her and jump overboard with her; so we must keep a sharp lookout upon the little creature, ma'am, and see that she don't go into that fore-castle."

"Ida," said Mrs. Howland, turning to the child, who had now walked to the opposite side of the vessel; "Ida, come here."

The little girl obeyed.

"Promise me that you will not go into the fore-castle to see the Spaniard."

"I won't, if you don't wish it, mamma;" and, bending, the fond mother kissed the child, knowing that she would keep her word.

An hour afterward, while Mrs. Howland was looking over her trunk, in the cabin, for some soothing medicine to send

to the wounded man, she heard the voice of the first officer pronouncing the name of her daughter in a loud voice.

She hurried to the deck, and beheld Ida in the foretop, which, being directly above the open fore-castle, commanded a view of the Spaniard lying in his bunk.

She seemed deaf to the cries of the first officer, who, in loud but persuasive tones, was requesting her to come down.

"Yes, Ida!" exclaimed the anxious mother, now joining her pleadings to those of the mate; "come down! Come down, my child, this instant!"

Ida turned to obey; but even as she did so a wild cry was heard, and the next moment the madman, who, chancing to turn his eyes upward while tossing about in his bunk, had seen the little girl looking down at him, emerged from the scuttle and darted up the fore-rigging.

"Save her! Save her! Oh, save my child!" shrieked Mrs. Howland, reading the fearful purpose of the madman in his wild, blood-shot eyes.

His fierce, terrible aspect frightened the child. She seized the topmost shrouds and ascended them rapidly, now and then directing a glance of terror at the man beneath her, who followed her, yelling and screaming like a half-famished tiger.

"Oh, can nothing be done to save my child?" shrieked the half-frantic mother, rushing forward. "That man will kill her! I feel it! I know it! Oh, my child, my child!"

"Fear nothing, madam; I trust I can save her," exclaimed the mate, as he bounded into the rigging on the lee side; "keep up a good heart."

He was the most active man in the ship, and the spectators watched him with breathless interest as he darted aloft like a squirrel.

The little girl was now clinging to the topgallant cross-trees, and the madman was only about ten feet below her. It seemed impossible for the first officer to reach the spot before she should be seized in the clutches of her frenzied pursuer.

Mrs. Howland clasped her hands tightly over her bosom. Her face was as white as a piece of bleached canvas, and her strained eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

Suddenly she uttered a long, wild, piercing cry of the most intense anguish as the madman clasped the little girl in one of his arms, while the mate was yet several feet below the cross-trees.

The next moment, with a yell that rang through every corner of the ship, the Spaniard started to leap from his lofty position, holding his fair burden tightly squeezed to his bosom.

The first mate sprang quickly upward, and caught the man by one of the legs of his pants; but he was too late to prevent the fearful leap.

Down, down, down, headlong from the rigging fell the madman, cleaving the air with the velocity of a shot, and the next instant the water closed over him and the little girl.

Mrs. Howland staggered against the foremast with a low, heartbroken moan; but the next instant the noise of a boat, as it struck the water, saluted her ears.

She sprang to the rail, as the main yard was hauled aback. She saw the boat speed swiftly away from the ship. The next moment something was hauled into it, and the next she saw her child uplifted in the arms of one of the crew of the little vessel.

Ten minutes afterward Ida was clasped to her heart; and, as she strained the sobbing girl to her bosom, she scarcely heeded the explanations of the crew, who stated that the head of the madman, in his descent, had struck one of the flukes of the anchor, which was now bespattered with his blood. The blow, of course, had killed him, and the child, who was unharmed, had risen to the surface.

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